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Impact of Leader In Me On Social-Emotional Learning of Elementary Students

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IMPACT OF LEADER IN ME ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING OF ELEMENTARY
STUDENTS

David J. Danielski
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
National College of Education at National Louis University

National College of Education
National Louis University
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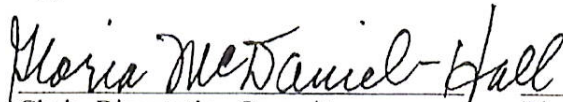

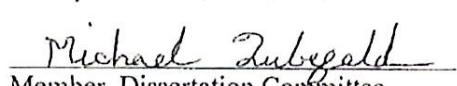
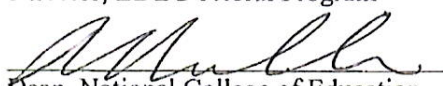
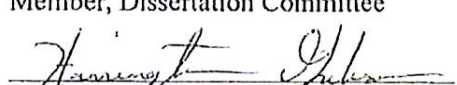
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STUDENTS

Dissertation Hearing

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

David J. Danielski
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

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ABSTRACT

Social-emotional learning and college and career readiness skills are increasingly important in preparing our students for a successful future. The Leader in Me, based on Steven Covey's seven habits, offers a process intended to increase the leadership skills of students through the explicit teaching of each of the habits. By studying the practices and outcomes of The Leader in Me process from schools with high degrees of implementation, this study evaluates the impact on social-emotional learning of elementary students. The findings inform programmatic decisions for social-emotional learning implementation and advocate for policy that emphasizes teacher preparedness and accountability measures for social-emotional learning that best prepare our students for a successful future.

PREFACE

I am an administrator at an elementary school located in the western suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. Over the last 21 years, I served both as a teacher and as a principal for the district's two largest elementary schools. While the schools are geographically close in proximity, they vary greatly with respect to the diversity of culture, race, and affluence. Being entrenched in both school communities within the same district gave me direct experience concerning the needs of our students in the school environment. It became apparent to me that while the community demographics can impact the degree to which schools should focus on social-emotional learning, all students need these skills to be successful in the future.

Realizing that the role of schools needs to be much more expansive than academic content dissemination and skill acquisition, it became evident that I needed to focus on strategies and techniques to develop the "whole child." My personal experiences as both a teacher and an administrator preempting this study point to the importance of social-emotional learning competencies and the development of skills for future success in college and the workplace. With this end in mind, my quest began to identify best practices with respect to the development of social-emotional learning skills. This is when I discovered *The Leader in Me*.

Encouraged and energized by observations of *The Leader in Me* in action, I began to share my experiences with my colleagues. Soon, I had arranged for most of the school staff to visit a *Leader in Me* school to observe the strategies and practices for themselves. As the discussion, energy, and intrigue began to spread, I decided that I needed to evaluate more deeply the impact this process had on the social-emotional learning of students.

The purpose of this study was to quantify and summarize the perceptions of this process of the teachers, support staff, and administrators from schools that have been committed to *The*

Leader in Me process. Through the use of surveys and principal interviews, I intended to understand better not only what overall impact this approach had on social-emotional learning, but also what programmatic pieces were the most effective. Additionally, I wanted to know which social-emotional learning standards this process was most effective in developing.

Several bodies of research were reviewed in this study. In addition to reviewing social-emotional learning and the existing research on Leader in Me, I reviewed scholarly research on the best practices for social-emotional learning implementation in schools. I also chose to deepen my understanding of college and career readiness and the specific skills needed for success in the workplace. Ultimately, the findings led me to advocate for policy and practices to prepare our students better to be well-rounded, social, emotionally strong, and adaptable to meet the needs of our changing world.

I am more convinced than ever that our students need the development of social-emotional competencies. As an education leader who is passionate about the success of our students, this paper advocates for mandated social-emotional training for pre-service teachers and the assessment of the social-emotional learning standards for all students.

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Impact of Leader in Me on Social-Emotional Learning of Elementary Students

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This researcher is a principal of an elementary school in the Chicago Metropolitan region. The school district is comprised of seven schools. Six K-five elementary schools feed one larger middle school serving students in grades six to eight. The following demographic, academic, school climate, and financial analysis provides the school's relative context within the state of Illinois.

The student population of the school where this researcher serves as principal is approximately 430 students. During the 2015-2016 school year, the student population at the school was 86% white and 12% low income. Low income is defined by students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The school district as a whole is 63% white, and 30% of the students are classified as low-income status.

The school parent-teacher association is strong, and parent volunteers are routine as well. Parents of the school have high expectations for the academic success of their students.

Although the school's standardized test scores are commensurate with the schools across the district, there is a sense that students are underperforming. During the 2015-2016 school year, 54% of grades three, four, and five students who took the PARCC exam were identified as "ready for the next level." This was slightly higher than the districtwide percentage of 51.3%. The statewide percentage of students "ready for the next level" based on the 2015-2016 assessment was a modest 34%.

The overall school climate is positive. A 2017 staff survey was completed by all certified staff members (see Appendix E). It indicated the following:

- 72% of staff members felt supported in their PLCs;

- 85% of staff members felt supported by staff members;
- 78% of staff members felt comfortable sharing opinions or concerns;
- 84% of staff members felt appreciated by their colleagues; and
- 88% of staff members reported the building morale as “positive.”

A similar student school climate survey was given to students and staff in 2017 (see Appendix F). The following data points provide a snapshot of our school from the students’ perspective:

- 96% of the students felt like they have a friend at our school;
- 73% of students reported enjoying coming to school; and
- 72% of students thought they have another adult they can go to aside from their classroom teacher.

The school also experiences a high level of support and involvement from the parent community. Although there was not a survey administered to the school’s parents, the 5Essentials survey indicated that our school earned the “more implementation” level for family involvement. Of the five areas that this statewide survey tool measures, “Involved Families” was rated the highest. Characteristics of the “More Implementation” level include the following:

- sees parents as partners in helping students learn;
- value parents’ input and participation in advancing the school’s mission; and
- supports efforts to strengthen its students’ community resources.

Financial resources across the district are plentiful in relation to the state averages. Whereas our district’s 2016 instructional per-pupil expenditure was \$9,383, the state average was \$7583. Similarly, the district’s 2016 operational per-pupil expenditure was \$15,111 compared to the state’s \$12,973.

The demographic, academic, school climate, and financial breakdown as measured by the State of Illinois School Report Card, school-based climate surveys, and the 5Essentials survey leads me to believe that the school is well-positioned for a new approach. This context is what led me to discover The Leader in Me. This researcher has been looking for the missing piece that could increase the school's overall perceived stature within the district.

During the fall of 2016, this researcher attended a "leadership day" at a school in the northern suburbs of Chicago for The Leader in Me program. This was an incredibly impactful morning for me. From the moment this researcher approached the school with students greeting guests, it was apparent that something was different about this school. It has been said by many that you can often tell a lot about the culture of a school within the first five minutes of visiting it. This was absolutely the case for me. Student energy and pride were evidenced through student ownership and leadership in every facet of the day. Students presented themselves as confident in their roles and proud of their school. The high level of student investment and loyalty demonstrated that it was "their" school.

Kindergarten students looked me square in the eyes, shook my hand firmly, and welcomed me to their classrooms. Students from all grades explained which habit meant the most to them and why. Students highlighted their leadership notebooks and their wildly important goals. Each classroom had data displayed for identified classroom goals, which were aligned to the building goals. Every student held some sort of leadership role in the classroom or the school in general. Students gave speeches in front of large audiences. Success stories and examples were shared and related to one of the seven habits. Leader in Me school environments were warm, welcoming, and evidenced a strong sense of pride among the students.

The Leader in Me is a program structured around Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989). The Leader in Me schools adopt the seven habits as a common language that is permeated throughout the school. Students are explicitly taught each of the habits. Assemblies reference the habits, hallways and classrooms are decorated with the vocabulary, and students and teachers reflect on the habits in a very consistent and routine way.

The students in the school practiced real-world, nonacademic content skills that encourage college and career readiness. Like in many schools, these skills do not find a consistent place in the daily, or even weekly, instruction in my school. The students in this Leader in Me school, while immersed in the common "seven habits" vocabulary, were given authentic opportunities to use critical thinking skills, to collaborate with one another, to adapt to changing circumstances, to take initiative, to effectively communicate with real audiences, to access and analyze information, and to promote their individual curiosity and imagination. This appeared to be a school that was legitimately giving students the skills and strategies needed for them to be more successful later in life.

This researcher left the experience with a newfound sense of motivation and purpose. This researcher was convinced that The Leader in Me philosophy and structure was good for the school and district as a whole. This uplifting experience confirmed the reason this researcher got into education in the first place.

After speaking with the superintendent about the "leadership day" this researcher attended, he was encouraged by my excitement. He supported a plan that allowed two colleagues and me to visit a Leader in Me symposium in San Antonio, Texas. In addition to student speeches, keynote addresses, and collaboration with colleagues, we spent a few hours in a Leader in Me school visiting classrooms. This experience further enhanced my excitement for this

program. The visit to the symposium in San Antonio replicated and confirmed the feelings of student ownership, leadership, and pride that this researcher first experienced with The Leader in Me. The opportunity to visit a school across the country structured on Steven Covey's leadership principles allowed me to observe and experience how The Leader in Me's implementation and student impact was translated in different settings. While there were plenty of school-based differences that this researcher observed, the positive commonalities were significant.

Visiting Leader in Me schools has given me a view into the culture of student leadership and the level of college and career readiness that this researcher hopes to achieve. Upon walking in the door, the immediate sense of positive school culture was extremely evident in The Leader in Me schools.

This researcher was sold on The Leader in Me completely. The importance of teaching social-emotional standards is something this researcher holds in high regard. Additionally, this researcher has appreciated and valued the effects of positive school culture in the schools where he has been privileged to work. Finally, this researcher's core belief in education is that for students to learn most effectively, they must have a trusting relationship with the teacher. As one popular expression goes, "Students do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." The Leader in Me seemed to present a structure that could blend social-emotional learning, strong and supportive school culture, and strong teacher-student relationships while providing students with increased leadership opportunities that promote college and career readiness.

Purpose

The Global Achievement Gap, by Tony Wagner (2008), makes a compelling case for an increased focus on seven survival skills for future readiness. He identifies critical thinking skills,

collaboration, adaptability, initiative, effective communication, accessing and analyzing information, curiosity, and imagination as competencies that students lack upon college graduation. The Leader in Me program blends well with Wagner's essential skills.

Steven Covey (1989) identifies the following seven habits of highly effective people:

- 1: be proactive,
- 2: begin with the end in mind,
- 3: put first things first,
- 4: think win-win,
- 5: seek first to understand, then be understood,
- 6: synergize, and
- 7: sharpen the saw.

Structuring a school around these seven habits and increasing opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership is an intriguing endeavor for me. Data suggest our school currently has a strong and supportive school culture and a solid foundation for academic success. The Leader in Me program could take us to the next level of preparing our students for a successful future with essential life skills.

Much like Muriel Summers, the co-author of "The Leader in Me," my sense is that Dr. Steven Covey's habits are natural, universal principles. When she talked to parents and community leaders, she found that they all wanted the same thing in a school, "They wanted students to grow up to be responsible, caring, and compassionate human beings who respected diversity and who know how to do the right thing when faced with difficult decisions" (Covey, Covey, Summers & Hatch, 2008. p. 20). What was of particular interest is that not once in all of her community outreach, interviews, and focus groups did she hear that they wanted to be the

best in academics. It was all about building character and basic life skills. Teaching Covey's seven habits to children aligns with these perceptions. This researcher truly believes there is value in teaching students about the benefits of being proactive and taking initiative. Thinking with the end in mind could be a powerful way to frame the goal-setting process. Prioritizing actions may help students both become more efficient and better capitalize on those actions with the strongest leverage to achieve results. Thinking about the concept of "win-win" enables students to develop the social-emotional skills of perspective-taking and developing empathy. When students "seek first to understand," they recognize the importance of empathetic listening and asking clarifying questions. Covey's habit called "synergize" is about teaching students to work well in groups. It helps students realize the end result of effective teamwork is greater than the sum of its parts. Finally, the concept of "sharpening the saw" is about taking care of oneself and providing balance in one's life. If students begin to understand and value this at an early age, logic tells me this will serve them well in the future.

My core beliefs about the importance of developing strong and trusting relationships with students, the importance of developing social-emotional intelligence, and my desire to build and maintain a positive and supportive school climate are well served by The Leader in Me framework. Additionally, this researcher believes Wagner's "survival skills" for future readiness are sufficiently interwoven into Covey's seven habits. It is for these reasons that my interest in understanding more about this program remains extremely high.

The importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) is validated by the development of specific standards for students. These standards have been developed in accordance with Section 15(a) of Public Act 93-0495. This act calls upon the Illinois State Board of Education to "develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as

part of the Illinois Learning Standards.” A total of 10 individual SEL standards support three umbrella goals:

Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.

- A. Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.
- B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.
- C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.

Goal 2: Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.

- A. Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.
- B. Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.
- C. Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.
- D. Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.

Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

- A. Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.
- B. Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily social situations.
- C. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.

Subsequently, Illinois School Board Policy 6.65 requires implementation into the district curriculum: “The superintendent shall incorporate SEL into the district’s curriculum and other educational programs consistent with the district’s mission and the goals and benchmarks of Illinois Learning Standards.”

Rationale

Most educators this researcher has spoken with regarding The Leader in Me, who also have familiarity with the program, have praised the program. In some ways, Leader in Me sounded too good to be true. Although there is very little information publicly available about the cost of the program, members of Leader in Me schools have confirmed the sizable financial investment. Presently, the school district where this researcher serves is in the exploratory phase of potential Leader in Me implementation. It is essential that this new approach to leadership is critically evaluated to ensure my excitement is not biasing me at the expense of true tangible school improvement. The tax-paying stakeholders need and deserve the assurance of a sound financial investment. Careful analysis of schools that are heavily invested in The Leader in Me process with respect to their impact on SEL of students and their ability to prepare students for their future success will provide me with the data needed for evaluative judgment. The degree to which these schools can positively influence the SEL of their students, and better prepare them for eventual success in college and careers will guide the implementation decisions for my own school and district.

Goals

The purpose of this program evaluation of Leader in Me is to determine the impact of using this process. Specifically, this researcher is interested in how participation in The Leader in Me process influences SEL for elementary school students, how it impacts the climate of the school, and how it prepares students for academic progress and future success in college and the workplace.

Regardless of the cost of the program, one essential question remains. Simply stated, is The Leader in Me process a sound investment? This study, centered around the following research questions, will uncover the answer.

My primary research question is, “To what extent does participation in the Leader in Me process impact social-emotional school learning for elementary students?” This will be measured by conducting Leader in Me “lighthouse” school staff surveys and principal interviews.

Related research questions that will be explored include the following:

- What elements of The Leader in Me process have the most significant impact on SEL?
- What elements of The Leader in Me process best prepare students for college and career readiness?
- What SEL standard is most impacted by The Leader in Me process implementation?
- What elements of The Leader in Me process are perceived as most impactful by principals of lighthouse schools?

The “lighthouse” designation is given to participating Leader in Me schools that have demonstrated a high level of commitment to the process. It is a standard set by Franklin Covey that recognizes program implementation with fidelity. Achieving this designation is considered a high honor. Applying for this benchmark typically occurs four to five years after a school begins The Leader in Me process. Currently, over 300 schools around the world have earned lighthouse certification by meeting the following criteria (“What is a lighthouse school,” 2018):

- The principal, school administration, and staff engage in ongoing learning and develop as leaders while championing leadership for the school.

- Leadership principles are effectively taught to all students through direct lessons, integrated approaches, and staff modeling. Students can think critically about and apply leadership principles.
- Families and the school collaborate in learning about the seven habits and leadership principles through effective communication and mutual respect.
- The school community can see leadership in the physical environment, hear leadership through the common language of the seven habits, and feel leadership through a culture of caring, relationships, and affirmation.
- Leadership is shared with students through a variety of leadership roles, and student voice leads to innovations within the school.
- Schoolwide, classroom, family, and community leadership events provide authentic environments to celebrate leadership, build culture, and allow students to practice leadership skills.
- The school utilizes the four disciplines of execution process to identify and track progress toward the high priority goals of the school, classroom, and staff members.
- Students lead their own learning with the skills to assess their needs, set appropriate goals, and carry out action plans. They track progress toward goals in leadership notebooks and share these notebooks with adults in student-led conferences.
- Teacher planning and reflection, trusting relationships, and student-led learning combine to create environments for highly engaged learning.

Leader in Me schools maintain their lighthouse certification for two years and continue to foster their growth in exemplifying a leadership culture. At the end of the two years, schools may recertify to maintain their lighthouse certification.

Despite The Leader in Me being an identifiable structure in over 3000 schools, there is a lack of scholarly research on its impact. The review of the literature in the following section intends to summarize research findings related to the seven habits of highly effective people, SEL, and the acquisition of essential life skills.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In my study of The Leader in Me's impact on SEL, three particularly relevant bodies of research will be reviewed. First, current research on SEL will be reviewed. This will include a summary of the research on best practices for implementing a new school-based program. Next, a review of the research that directly relates to The Leader in Me, and Steven Covey's seven habits will be conducted. Finally, the literature related to essential skills and competencies for college and career readiness will be reviewed.

Social and Emotional Learning

In Daniel Goleman's publication, *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), SEL is defined as a way of understanding and recognizing personal and social needs, creating and maintaining healthy relationships, setting and attaining goals, making ethically responsible decisions, and avoiding undesirable behaviors. (Elias, 1997). However, it was much earlier that emotion was identified as a significant factor in education, "In 'Human Nature and Conduct,' Dewey (1922) advanced a concept of moral character that has many important affinities with the concept of emotional intelligence which Goleman seeks to popularize" (Zigler, 1998).

Lev Vygotsky's work of the 1920s and 1930s has become the foundation of much research and theory in cognitive development over the past several decades. What has become known as social development theory is of particular relevance. His theories stress the necessity of social interaction in the development of cognition. He believed that social learning precedes cognitive development and that community plays a critical role in meaning-making (Vygotsky, as cited in McLeod, 2014).

The idea of developing a student's emotional intelligence to support and foster both cognitive and social competencies is related to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development

scheme. Within this theoretical framework, Vygotsky proposes that a child's cognitive potential and growth are not limited by fixed parameters. Rather, there is a zone in which further cognitive development can occur. This zone of potential development is affected by outside influences such as strategic educational programs that systematically integrate both cognitive and emotional skills within their structure. Indeed, Vygotsky has argued that social relations (which constitute a primary dimension of emotional intelligence) are the primary function for cognitive development.

An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

More recently, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) promotes SEL in schools across the country through research and initiatives. The organization was founded in 1994 by educator Daniel Goleman and philanthropist Eileen Rockefeller Growald (CASEL, 2006). It was not until 2004 that the Illinois State Board of Education approved standards for SEL implementation in the classroom. The SEL framework includes three goals that speak to five competencies. According to "Illinois Learning Standards" (2011):

Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success. Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

The CASEL has defined SEL as the process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to:

- recognize and manage their emotions,
- set and achieve positive goals,
- demonstrate caring and concern for others,
- establish and maintain positive relationships,
- make responsible decisions, and
- handle interpersonal situations effectively.

These social-emotional competencies involve skills that enable children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships and resolve conflicts respectfully, make ethical and safe choices, and contribute constructively to their community. CASEL identified the five groups of interrelated competencies that SEL programs should address. Each is described below.

Self-awareness is the ability to accurately assess one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths. It involves maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence. *Self-management* is the regulating of one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in addressing challenges. It means expressing emotions appropriately. It also includes the setting and monitoring of progress toward personal and academic goals. *Social awareness* is being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others. This skill allows one to recognize and appreciate individual and group similarities and differences. Making the best use of family, school, and community resources is also a part of being socially aware. *Relationship skills* allow one to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation. The resisting of inappropriate social pressure; asking for help when needed; and preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict are part of this skill set. Finally, *responsible*

decision-making refers to the making of decisions based on the consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, and respect for others. The ability to evaluate the likely consequences of various actions, and applying these skills to academic and social situations allows responsible decision-makers to contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.

While years ago, the focus of schools was centrally based on the delivery and acquisition of academic content, a strong case is made for the inclusion of SEL in today's schools. The American people have expressed their conviction that the primary purpose of public schooling is to prepare children to become effective and responsible citizens (Rose & Gallup, 2000). For our country's future, and for social justice, it is critical that all children, particularly the disadvantaged and the poor, have the opportunity to develop the social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions that provide the foundation for the tests of life, health, relationships, and adult work (Cohen, 2006). Cohen goes on to say, "Our nation's current dramatic overemphasis on linguistic and mathematical learning is shortsighted and misguided" (Cohen, 2006, p. 228). Zigler echoes that notion as he refers to the debate about the relative importance of academic versus social and emotional skills as a "false dichotomy," as decades of research that social-emotional and academic skills are "interconnected" (as cited in Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Schools play not only an essential role in the development of cognitive skills but emotional development as well (Greenberg, Weissberg, & O'Brien, 2003). Payton argues that the current demands of society require additional skills from children, such as being socially and emotionally competent, to adapt themselves to the complex demands of growth and development, and to attain successful adult lives (as cited in Raimundo & Marques-Pinto, 2013). The skills that will allow children to develop personal plans and goals; learn to cooperate with

others; and deal with the everyday challenges, setbacks, and disappointments are necessary to become the kind of citizens the founders wanted public education to create (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). Social and emotional competencies are not secondary to the mission of education, but they are concrete factors in the success of teachers, students, and schools (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013). SEL competencies can help students become better communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders and self-advocators, resilient individuals, and caring, concerned members of their communities (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004). These skills have been identified by today's employers and educators as important for success in the workplace and postsecondary settings.

Bar-On (1995) explains that social and emotional capacities are just as linguistic and mathematical competencies in that the vast majority of children can learn to become more socially and emotionally competent (as cited in Cohen, 2006). Ashdown and Bernard (2012) also support the findings of a number of other researchers who have argued that by improving children's levels of social-emotional competence through explicit instruction it is possible to improve their levels of social-emotional well-being and academic achievement.

The benefits of SEL for students are extensive. The broad-scale benefits of SEL programs are illustrated from a meta-analysis conducted from 213 universal SEL programs that contain the SEL framework components (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Durlak et al. (2011) discovered that the impact of a quality social-emotional program can be credited for positive growth in social-emotional skills, as well as academic and behavioral growth. SEL programs can enhance children's confidence in themselves, increase their engagement in school along with their test scores, and reduce behavior problems while at the same time promoting desirable behaviors. Since the publication of that first study, three

additional meta-analyses have been conducted (Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017; Wiglesworth et al., 2016). All three echoed the earlier one's major findings: When researchers synthesized results from hundreds of existing studies in this area, they found that students who participated in SEL programs saw greater gains in SEL competencies and academic performance relative to students who did not participate (Mahoney, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2018). Children with greater social-emotional competence are more likely to be ready for college, succeed in their careers, have positive relationships, better mental health, and become engaged citizens (Greenberg et al., 2017). Findings from CASEL's three scientific reviews included that students in SEL programs demonstrated improvement in multiple areas of their personal, social, and academic lives. SEL programs yielded positive effects on students' social-emotional skills, attitudes toward self, school, and others, on behavior problems, and on academic performance. Specifically, students' average gain on achievement test scores was 11 to 17 percentage points. The effects of SEL programs are achieved for student populations that are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse and are without regard for students exhibiting behavioral, emotional, or early learning difficulties (Payton et al., 2008).

The mental health of students is positively impacted by SEL instruction. The U.S. Public Health Service proclaimed, "Mental health is a critical component of children's learning and general health. Fostering social and emotional health in children as part of a healthy child's development must be a national priority" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 420). This sentiment was supported by the CASEL study conducted by researchers at Loyola University and the University of Illinois, which analyzed evaluations of more than 233,000 students across the country. They discovered that SEL helps students in every way (Goleman, 2008).

Given the positive findings of the research related to SEL, CASEL recommends that federal, state, and local policies and practices encourage the broad implementation of well-designed, evidence-based SEL programs during and after school (Payton, 2008).

Best Practices for Social-Emotional Program Implementation

Implementation refers to the process through which an innovation (a new program or intervention) is adopted, established, and maintained within an organization (Forman, 2015). Program adoption and training are important parts of the process, but on their own, they do not ensure implementation (Hord, Rutherford, Huling, & Hall, 2006). A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of effective implementation. One large-scale review of prevention programs found that in more than 500 studies, implementation practices had an important impact on program outcomes (Durlack & Dupree, 2008).

Successful implementation of SEL requires a cycle of continuous improvement, which includes:

- following a purposeful, well-conceived plan,
- starting small with a commitment to expand through ongoing development,
- measuring implementation fidelity to understand what has happened in an intervention and to enhance service delivery, and
- assessing SEL outcomes.

In addition to crucial elements, implementation can be conceptualized by stages. The stages of implementation are commonly described as dissemination, adoption, implementation, and sustainability (Durlak & Dupree, 2008). Districts should pursue a systematic approach to SEL planning and implementation that considers resources, needs, and stakeholder input.

CASEL (2013) recommends that districts form a collaborative committee representing key stakeholder groups to develop SEL definitions and vision statements.

A meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs found that those who reported implementation problems (e.g., programs that failed to conduct all specified activities or to train staff properly) were far less successful than programs that reported sound implementation (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition to their key finding that implementation problems adversely influence program effectiveness, they found that the programs that incorporated sequenced, active, focused, and explicit procedures and techniques were more likely to lead to academic success. SEL efforts are most successful when they also (Jones & Bouffard, 2012):

- occur within supportive contexts,
- build adult competencies,
- collaborate with family and community,
- focus on key behaviors and skills, and
- set reasonable goals.

Because implementation is the process of executing a plan, having a purposeful, well-conceived plan is the first step. Harvard's Graduate School of Education outlined six recommendations for effective SEL implementation (Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2017):

1. Allot the time required to implement the program sufficiently and effectively.
2. Extend SEL beyond the classroom.
3. Apply SEL strategies and skills in real-time.
4. Ensure sufficient staff support and training.
5. Facilitate program ownership and buy-in.
6. Use data to inform decision-making.

Phasing in implementation gradually while, at the same time, supporting teachers is a model to aspire to. Schools that have successfully implemented SEL programs have started with pilot projects, examined them thoroughly, and then committed to ongoing development (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Van Velsor, 2009). The ongoing development of teachers is commonly referred to as teacher capacity.

Teachers play an important role in the successful implementation of SEL programs. The adoption and implementation of programming are insufficient to achieve desired outcomes unless teacher capacity is developed and supported (Shanker, 2014). Implementation must consider how to build the attitudes, confidence, understanding, intervention skills, and social-emotional competence of teachers to sustain a successful program (Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2008). To improve the use of SEL programs in our schools, efforts must be made to improve teacher capacity (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). It is the role of the educational leaders to drive school improvement, especially in building professional community and teacher capacity (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Rogers (2002) makes a case for empowering teacher leaders in the development of champions or teams of champions who can advocate for and encourage change, and who agree to steer the change process and improve system infrastructure. A key function of the teacher champions is to help make a case for the program change and to help influence others. Unless stakeholders in a system accept the idea that change is needed and that it does not conflict with the existing priorities, new and innovative practices will not take hold or sustain (Petersilia, 1990). Fullan (2006) suggests that there is no point in advocating for new policies if one is not promoting the capacity to implement them at the same time. Both Fullan (2006) and Elmore (2004) highlight

the need for capacity building that is focused on sustainable improvement, where school and central office personnel learn from one another.

One framework outlining the full implementation cycle is described in the CASEL practice rubric for schoolwide SEL implementation, which outlines 10 steps over 3 phases, along with a set of factors that enhance implementation, such as providing ongoing professional development, evaluating practices and outcomes, and nurturing collaboration with families and the community (CASEL, 2006). This framework is below:

Readiness phase

- Step 1. Principal commits to schoolwide SEL initiative.
- Step 2. Principal engages key stakeholders and creates the SEL steering committee.

Planning phase

- Step 3. Develop and articulate a shared vision.
- Step 4. Conduct a schoolwide needs and resources assessment.
- Step 5. Develop an action plan for implementation.

Implementation phase

- Step 7. Conduct initial professional development activities.
- Step 8. Launch social and emotional learning instruction in classrooms.
- Step 9. Expand classroom programming and integrate SEL schoolwide.
- Step 10. Revisit implementation activities and adjust for continuing improvement.

For a school improvement initiative to succeed, education leaders must do more than adopt a new program and train the staff. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) offers four insights on managing the implementation of school improvement efforts (LaTurner & Lewis, 2013):

1. Don't just adopt a new program; implement it.
2. Understand that change is personal.
3. Define the change.
4. Use data before, during, and after implementation.
5. Commit for the long haul.

Measuring the implementation is a step that is often overlooked. A recent meta-analysis of the SEL literature noted that only 57% of studies reported implementation fidelity (Durlak et al., 2011), and only one-third of the studies that demonstrated positive effects of SEL programs examined the association between implementation and outcomes (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). The measurement of implementation should use multiple sources and be conducted over time. Because unforeseen factors may influence implementation fidelity from day to day, measuring implementation on more than one occasion can increase accuracy (Humphrey, 2013).

Payton et al. (2008) state that a well-designed evaluation of implementation is an important feature of quality SEL programming. To improve program delivery, we should focus our efforts on evaluating those activities intended to support the delivery of a program. It is vital that education professionals expand their thinking to a systems-level approach (Durlak & Dupree, 2008; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). A systems-level approach is essential because convergent evidence demonstrates that implementation is affected by multiple interacting ecological factors. That is, their effects on each other are reciprocal and multiplicative. To effectively collect, analyze, and use data to examine process, integrity, and efficacy, all interacting ecological factors should be evaluated (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004).

Relevant data are important to help leaders choose the appropriate program, determine how staff are implementing the program, and, ultimately, what impact the program is having on students. In other words, leaders must plan to collect data before, during, and after program implementation (Hall et al., 2006).

Having summarized the literature about SEL, and best practices for program implementation, the next section will discuss the research surrounding a specific SEL approach, The Leader in Me process.

The Leader in Me

The Leader in Me is a philosophical approach to school culture and leadership. It is not a curriculum. The Leader in Me was developed by Covey (2008) and is based on the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1987). Through the direct teaching of leadership principles, the model is purposed to build the leadership capacity of every member of the school community.

The Leader in Me program began in 1999 intending to transform the culture of A.B. Combs Elementary School in North Carolina. After Principal Muriel Summers took a course in Covey's seven habits, she modeled her school around these leadership principles (Covey, 2008; Fonzi & Richie, 2011). A.B. Combs Elementary School experienced improved test scores, decreased disciplinary infractions, and has sustained a culture of success for more than a decade.

Covey's first habit is to "be proactive." This habit involves individuals taking responsibility for their learning and their direction in life. Covey explains that our behavior is a product of our personal choice, independent of our environment (Covey, 2013). "Begin with the end in mind" is habit two. Using this framework, students are taught that the realization of their personal vision is dependent upon the ability to plan ahead and set meaningful goals (Covey,

2014). “Putting first things first” helps students to organize and execute around priorities. Covey explains that habit three is about managing purpose, values, roles, and priorities (Covey, 2013). Habit four is “think win-win.” This philosophy encourages the finding of agreements and solutions that are mutually beneficial and satisfying (Covey, 2013). The fifth habit requires empathetic listening. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood,” reinforces the power of communication and teaches students to listen to other people’s ideas and feelings (Covey, 2013). Working in groups is the basis for Covey’s sixth habit. “Synergize” can best be described as creative cooperation, and subscribes to the notion “two heads are better than one” (Covey, 2013). Covey’s seventh habit calls for students to find balance and take care of themselves by maintaining mental, physical, social/emotional, and spiritual health (Covey, 2013).

The Leader in Me is based on the belief that everyone is a leader and has the capacity to guide his or her own life. Contrary to the traditional hierarchical model of leadership where people are appointed or put into positions of leadership, Covey (2008) suggests that one can lead regardless of his or her socioeconomic status or position in life.

A second foundational belief is that the seven habits are universal and pertain to everyone. They are not gender, race, class, or age-specific (Covey, 2008).

The Leader in Me requires a cultural shift in teaching and learning. In this new paradigm, schools focus on developing adults first. This is an inside-out approach and requires commitment from everyone. Typically, the schools begin with a book study and an informal meeting to determine whether The Leader in Me is a process that the staff wants to pursue. Next, an intensive three days of training in the seven habits is required for all employees to begin the cultural shift in thinking (Covey, 1989). Embedded in this training is an opportunity for staff members to develop a personal vision that guides their own individual leadership path and

creates a common vision for the school. The vision drives the process moving forward (Fullan, 2010).

Activities after the training include weekly meetings with an accountability partner. Staff members are encouraged to find private victories centered around the first three habits. Further, activities during the first seven weeks allow the staff to introduce the language of the seven habits to the students. Being proactive, seeking understanding, and putting first things first are common vocabulary intended to keep the habits at the forefront of the teachers' and students' minds (Covey, 2008).

Professional development for staff is ongoing as a trainer returns near the three-month implementation mark. The focus of this training is to continue the work on school vision and to make plans to integrate The Leader in Me into the environment, traditions, curricula, systems, and routines of the school community. It is at this time when a lighthouse team of staff members and a group of trainers is organized to continue the seven habits and ensure the sustained training for new employees.

DuFour and Eaker (1999) referred to this type of transformation as “non-linear” (p. 282) and a “persistent endeavor” (p. 283), which suggests that the school culture is not predisposed to produce one specific product. The cultural shift begins by “fully integrating the habits into the curriculum, systems, and culture of the school” (Fonzi & Richie, 2011, p. 4).

Effective implementation of any program needs true system reform (DuFour & Eaker, 2009). Creating a new culture centered on leadership is not a small task and will take a focused and comprehensive support network. Franklin Covey Education (The Leader in Me, 2012) makes it clear that this program is not an event or a curriculum, but a ubiquitous leadership development that focuses on the teaching of leadership and social-emotional competencies as an

integrated approach. As a staff member in a Leader in Me school describes, “It is not doing one more thing, it is doing what you’re already doing in a better way” (Covey, 2008, p. 34). This approach is embedded in every lesson, instructional method, and the school organization as a whole.

Implementation of The Leader in Me varies across schools in the way it would for any new initiative. Covey developed the lighthouse school award to both encourage the implementation and to determine the program’s effectiveness (The Leader in Me, 2013). To earn lighthouse status, programs must first be a Leader in Me school for at least three years. Specific criteria needed to earn lighthouse status include the development of a lighthouse team, staff collaboration, community engagement, leadership environment, leadership instruction and curriculum, student leadership, leadership events, goal setting and tracking, and measurable results.

Case studies have been published regarding the impact of The Leader in Me on student achievement and discipline.

A.B. Combs Elementary School was the first school to use The Leader in Me. The success rate of the original pilot group as well as the rest of the campus reached state passing scores of 94% within three years of implementation. The school community also experienced improved parent satisfaction, involvement from the community, and a sustained leadership culture for more than a decade (Hatch, 2012).

Ross and Laurenzano (2012) conducted a case study of two elementary schools that implemented The Leader in Me: one on the east coast and one on the west. They found students reported a decrease in bullying and an increase in self-confidence. Teachers and administrators also reported improved academic achievement on state tests, improved overall behavior, and

greater responsibility for school work. Parent involvement also increased on both campuses. Aside from these quantifiable results was the less tangible “prideful identity and a unique sense of purpose” felt at the schools (Hatch, 2012)

The Leader in Me’s schoolwide transformational approach is intended to meet today’s challenges in schools. Among these challenges are improving student achievement in core academic subjects, preparing students with 21st-century life skills, and creating a learning culture where students and adults feel safe and engaged (Hatch & Anderson, 2014).

Challenges related to school culture include reducing bullying, managing classroom behavior, staff and parent engagement, relationship building, and the sharing of leadership. The Leader in Me impacts culture-related challenges, and participating schools are reporting promising results including reduced discipline problems, increased student engagement, students taking more responsibility for education, more teacher engagement, the establishment of a common language, enhanced parent involvement and satisfaction, and better attendance (Hatch & Anderson, 2014).

A foundational part of The Leader in Me process involves the teaching of Covey’s seven habits to all the students, staff, and parents. The seven habits have been sought after by top leaders of companies and governments around the world because of their alignment with 21st-century life skills. Whereas the first three habits focus on helping individuals to lead their life more effectively and to become more self-reliant, the next three habits encourage individuals to work with others more effectively. The final habit focuses on one’s continual improvement and becoming a well-balanced person (Hatch & Anderson, 2014).

Covey argues that his “seven habits” are 21st-century skills, but also explains that they are the same skills and traits of character that he discovered in his study of the success-makers of

the 18th and 19th centuries. He surmises that these seven habits are the same skills that will make people more effective in the 22nd and 23rd centuries (Covey, 2009). This implies that his seven habits for highly effective people are timeless principles to meet the demands of our current and future times. The following paragraphs will review research related to these life skills for the 21st century.

Skills and Competencies for College and Career Readiness

The term *21st-century skills* can be broadly interpreted to mean the skills needed for students to be successful in the future. What specific skills and competencies these are, however, are outlined by a variety of researchers. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2009) referred to 21st-century skills as “skills that increasingly demand creativity, perseverance, and problem-solving combined with performing well as part of a team.”

Perhaps most well-known with respect to articulating the 21st-century skills are the “4 Cs”; critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity; which were identified by the Partnership for 21st-Century Skills (Richardson, 2017). The Partnership for 21st-Century Skills, a leading advocacy organization that promotes the infusion of 21st-century skills into education, developed a framework for 21st-century learning. The framework offers the following student outcomes:

- core subjects and 21st-century themes;
- learning and innovation skills;
- information, media, and technology skills; and
- life and career skills.

The framework describes the skills, knowledge, and expertise students need to enter today’s workforce successfully (“Partnership for 21st-century skills,” 2009).

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE; 2007) outlined the following needs in an increasingly digital world:

- creativity and innovation;
- communication and collaboration;
- research and information fluency;
- critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making;
- digital citizenship; and
- technology operations and concepts.

Although the specific terms mentioned when scholars refer to “21st-century skills” vary, all generally emphasize what students can do with knowledge and how they apply what they learn in authentic contexts. Strong communication and collaboration skills; expertise in technology, innovation, and creative thinking skills; and the ability to solve problems are all implied in these descriptions (Larson & Miller, 2011).

Tony Wagner (2008) proposes seven survival skills for the 21st century. First, is critical thinking and problem-solving. He states, “It turns out that asking good questions, critical thinking, and problem-solving go hand in hand in the minds of most employers and business consultants, and taken together they represent the First Survival Skill of the new global ‘knowledge economy’” (Wagner, 2008, p. 15).

Collaboration across networks and leading by influence represent his second survival skill. The Partnership for 21st-Century Skills shares this sentiment as an advocate for understanding and appreciating diverse cultures as an additional core competency that all high school graduates need to master (Wagner, 2008). He notes that corporations are less hierarchical and more reciprocal and relational in relation to their accountability structures. The ability to

influence diverse groups and create alliances of groups to work collaboratively toward a common goal will be increasingly important (Wagner, 2008). The need for “human skills”; how to get along, how to cooperate, and how a group can exhibit emotional intelligence; are absent from the standard academic curriculum in our schools (Goleman, 2008). Americans need to understand the perspectives of people from other parts of the world. Our future graduates may be buying from them, selling to them, or even voting on issues that arise for our conflicts and/or collaborations with those from other countries. We need to understand more than we do about the people whose cultures are different from our own (Tucker, 2016).

The third of Wagner’s survival skills consists of agility and adaptability. Lifelong learning is stressed, and employers are looking for individuals who have a passion for embracing new ideas. He states, “I can guarantee that the job I hire someone to do will change or may not exist in the future, so this is why adaptability and learning skills are more important than technical skills” (Wagner, 2008, p. 30). The future will require workers to be lifelong learners with the ability to adjust and adapt to continuously changing markets (Bevins, Carter, Jones, Moye, & Ritz, 2012).

The fourth survival skill that Wagner advocates for 21st-century success consists of initiative and entrepreneurialism. Through countless interviews with leaders of global companies, he summarizes that leaders today want to see individuals take more initiative, be self-starters, and be more entrepreneurial in the ways that opportunities, ideas, and strategies for improvement are sought (Wagner, 2008).

The importance of effective oral and written communication is underscored, as Wagner names this his fifth survival skill for a global economy. According to Wagner (2008), “The ability to express one’s views clearly in a democracy and to communicate effectively across

cultures is an important citizenship skill as well” (p. 34). The idea of writing being a lost art was a common theme that consistently resurfaced during his interviews. The ability to create focus, energy, and passion and writing with a real voice was also emphasized. In the 21st-century classroom, students should collaborate and communicate in both online and offline environments. As online communication skills become increasingly important, students benefit from online book clubs, science forums, or other forms of virtual experiences (Larson & Miller, 2011).

The sixth of Wagner’s survival skills is accessing and analyzing information. With our increasing abundance of information, it is more important than for prospective employees of today’s workforce to know how to analyze it. Of great importance is the need for students’ ability to use technology to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information (Larson & Miller, 2011).

Finally, the seventh survival skill is curiosity and imagination. Daniel Pink captures this necessity as he states:

For businesses, it’s no longer enough to create a product that’s reasonably priced and adequately functional. It must also be beautiful, unique, and meaningful. . . . In an age of abundance, appealing only to rational, logical, and functional needs is woefully insufficient. Engineers must figure out how to get things to work. But if those things are not also pleasing to the eye or compelling to the soul, few will buy them. There are too many other options. (as cited in Wagner, 2008, pp. 39-40)

The seven survival skills that Wagner outlines are complementary to the seven key skill sets that Trilling (2008) states educators and business have identified to close the gap between the knowledge and skills needed for success in life and the current state of education (as cited in

Moylan, 2008). Their interpretations of the essential skills are the “seven Cs”: (a) critical thinking and problem-solving, (b) creativity and innovation, (c) collaboration, teamwork, and leadership, (d) cross-cultural understanding, (e) communications and information fluency, (f) computing and information and communication technology, and (g) career and learning self-reliance (Moylan, 2012).

The need for urgency with regard to the acquisition of 21st-century skills is apparent in the context that the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Bevins et al., 2012) offers; “For the first time in history, America’s younger generation is less well-educated and, thus, less prepared than its parents” (p. 9).

The need for curricular focus on 21st-century skills is noted as Morrison (as cited in Bevins et al., 2012) described four looming perfect storms: (a) workforce shortages, (b) educational attainment, (c) global competition, and (d) decreasing value of the economy. The severity of these “storms” is evidenced by the following observable trends in the workforce:

- 21st-century workplace and technical skills have become more important than land and buildings. Critically trained human capital must be trained through a complex educational system.
- 21st-century workplace skills are becoming just as, or more important than, basic technical skills. Educators are starting to recognize this and to determine how to teach these skills (Bevins et al., 2012).
- Workforce and economic development are increasingly a K-12 issue, with many communities lagging behind in understanding how businesses and schools must work together (Delano & Hutton, 2007).

The intensely rapid nature of change is noted with regard to increased “intelligent machinery” and automation. The McKinsey Global Institute (Economist, as cited in Tucker, 2016) explains this transformation is happening 10 times faster and at 300 times the scale, or roughly 3,000 times the impact of the Industrial Revolution.

This new reality is echoed as Richardson (2016) states:

The new reality is that our students will be required to build their own curricula, find their own teachers, and assess themselves as learners and doers in an increasingly complex variety of contexts. That is the work of the new global-ready learners. Preparing them for it is the work of the modern school (p. 29).

Preparing students for the future has often been thought of like a moving target. The basic skills commonly thought of as the “three Rs” are not sufficient to meet the demands of today’s reality. Innovation, creativity, the ability to work as part of a team, and to work through complex problems and find solutions are becoming increasingly important in the global economy and interconnected world (Donahue, 2008). Recent legislation (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015) honors widening the definition of K-12 student progress and success. In addition to traditional achievement indicators, the ESSA is calling attention to the role of nonacademic factors in contributing to educational outcomes (Elchert et al., 2017).

The immediate implications for today’s schools are clear. Teachers need to develop problem-based scenarios that are localized and the solutions of which will make a difference in the growth of the students we serve. Students need to think, collaborate, design, develop, and test solutions in small teams. Trial and error need to be valued as an important means to innovative thinking (Bevins et al., 2012). Problem-based learning is so important because it excels at meeting each of the “S” goals, namely, to develop self, to develop the students’ skills, and to

prepare students for society (Moylan, 2008). These skills students need for the society in which they will work and live should not be thought of as one more thing to teach, but rather, training integrated across all curricular areas (Larson & Miller, 2011).

Three changes that our schools can make to place emphasis on developing students as voracious, continual learners are to articulate the abilities needed by students, create deep learning cultures, and to free students to pursue their interests (Richardson, 2012). More than anything, our students need to be passionate learners, able to create their own personal learning curriculum, finding their own mentors and teachers, and connecting with others with whom they can collaborate and create (Richardson, 2017).

Schools need to actively move past the knowledge and comprehension levels of Bloom's taxonomy (1956). It is critically important for teachers to engage students in activities where students can apply knowledge, analyze that knowledge in multiple ways, synthesize or create new knowledge, and continually evaluate (Larson & Miller, 2011).

New research-based metrics are being introduced to more appropriately assess that students are college ready, career ready, and life ready. Redefining Ready! is a national initiative launched by the School Superintendents Association (AASA) to do this task ("National college and career readiness indicators," 2018). Redefining Ready! was launched under the leadership of David R. Schuler (AASA past president and 2018 National Superintendent of the Year), and AASA has introduced this initiative in 33 states, plus Washington D.C. and Montreal, Canada. The cohort argues that traditional measurement tools of college and career readiness are no longer appropriate:

America's high schools have a profound responsibility to ensure that our nation's 14 million high school students are college ready, career ready, and life ready. Standardized

test scores—traditionally used as the primary readiness indicator—do not always provide an accurate representation of our students’ potential. Like the global economy, today’s students are driven by ideas and innovations. They should not be reduced down to or defined by a single test score. (“National college and career readiness indicators,” 2017)

In Redefining Ready!’s 2017 Annual Report, in addition to outlining new indicators for being college ready and career ready, the following life ready indicators were provided:

- Being life ready means students leave high school with the grit and perseverance to tackle and achieve their goals.
- Students who are life ready possess the growth mindset that empowers them to approach their future with confidence, to dream big, and to achieve big.
- Our nation’s schools provide social and emotional support and experiences to equip students with the life ready skills they will need for success in their future.

Having outlined the literature on the skills and competencies for college and career readiness, I will now narrow the discussion to a review of the specific skills necessary for success in the workplace.

Skills and Competencies Necessary for Success in the Workplace

In December 2014, The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Committee surveyed 606 representatives from organizations that hire through a university relations and recruiting effort. When asked to indicate the specific competencies essential to new college hire success in the workplace, professional/work ethic topped the list. Four competencies were identified as “absolutely essential” or “essential” by 90% or more of the respondents. In addition to professionalism/work ethic was critical thinking/problem-solving, oral/written communications, and teamwork/collaboration (NACE, 2019).

In large part, the “soft skills” are necessary for success in the workplace. Different scholars have seen the list of soft skills in different contexts; however, the skills have the common outcome of aiding personal growth, learning, and employment success (Gibb, 2014). Today’s workers from all industries have fewer repetitive tasks and much more autonomy in their work environment, which means that they need to make more decisions, interact with more people, and communicate effectively with people at different levels (Brungardt, 2011). The four soft skills he identified for any employee were teamwork, problem-solving, decision-making, and communication.

Lim, Lee, Yap, and Ling (2016) confirm this thinking as they identified a set of soft skills that are highly rated by employers: (a) analytical skills, (b) strong decision-making process, (c) oral and written communication skills, (d) problem-solving, (e) teamwork skills, (f) ability to gather information, (g) and ability to work under pressure. Among all of these skills, written and oral communication skills were the most important that employers identified as necessary for any new employee to be successful (Lim et al., 2016).

Marques (2013) contributed to the discussion of soft skills when he stressed that soft skills are critical to individuals who want to achieve leadership positions in their organizations. Marques explained that world-wide known leaders; such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Pope John Paul II; were spiritual and/or political leaders who were noted for their soft skills or who were well equipped with soft skills. Additionally, Marques noted that soft skills are gaining importance, not just in the United States, but also in other countries. These countries include the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, India, and Malaysia. According to Marques, soft skills are seen by companies to provide a competitive advantage over competitors.

One reason soft skills promote success in the workplace is that soft skills are not something that can be quickly developed or outsourced. Marques (2013) included the following list of soft skills based on the result of his study: (a) concern for others, (b) motivation, (c) honesty, (d) integrity, (e) inspiration, and (f) teamwork. This list seems to be more in alignment with the social competencies of emotional intelligence illustrated by Goleman (1998), which included recognizing others' feelings, needs, and concerns, and being able to induce desirable responses in others.

Some researchers use the term *employability skills* to describe the skills and competencies necessary for success in the workplace. The workforce in the 21st century not only requires graduates with strong academic credentials but also prepared with a number of skills and attributes (OECD, 2013). These employability skills are required by students to prepare themselves to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. Among these skills are critical thinking, the ability to solve problems, and excellence with communication skills. The technology advances, and the competitive nature of today's work require graduates to have the skills and ability to adapt to their working environment (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010).

Verbal and written communication happens every day in the workplace. Managers give directions to workers, coworkers communicate to plan a project, and employees communicate information to customers. This ability to communicate effectively is one of the employability skills necessary for workplace success (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011).

Problem-solving and decision-making are also employability skills. To compete, job seekers must be able to find logical solutions to the problems and be able to make sound decisions. These skills are sometimes used interchangeably.

Employability requires teamwork. Teamwork commits individuals to work together in a cooperative environment to achieve common goals by sharing knowledge and skills. The key characteristics of a team are its focus toward a common goal and a clear purpose (Fisher, Hunter, & Macrosson, 1997).

Whether you call them soft skills, employability skills, or another term of your choosing, adaptability, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork are the competencies that encourage success in the workplace.

In the next section, the methodology for this program review will be outlined. It will include an explanation of the study's participants, data gathering techniques, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To borrow the sentiment from Steven Covey's second habit, "Begin with the end in mind," it is important to be clear and transparent about the intended uses of the findings of this study. As Patton (2008) states, "To evaluate how well you're doing, you must have someplace you're trying to go" (p. 98). The intent was for this study to be used in an instrumental way where the findings directly inform the decision to invest in The Leader in Me process. Because this researcher is determined the merit, worth, significance, and value of the program, this intended use was to make an overall summative judgment (Patton, 2008).

Patton (2008) stresses the importance of working with intended uses as he states that in "utilization-focused evaluation, the primary intended users determine whose goals will be evaluated" and whether "goal attainment" is the focus of the evaluation (p. 232). Covey (1989) would explain this as the ability to put first things first. It is for this reason that this researcher worked closely with the school district and my own teaching staff to determine the most appropriate questions and processes to solicit the answers. Identifying the key information needed to ultimately make a decision about the future of a Leader in Me process in my school was done collaboratively.

Participants

The key participants were staff members, both certified and noncertified, and administrators from identified Leader in Me lighthouse schools in the state of Illinois. Schools were selected that have earned the "lighthouse" status from The Leader in Me organization. This distinction is given to schools that have met rigorous criteria to evidence full implementation of The Leader in Me process. By surveying staff members from these schools, themes, and

practices related to the SEL, standards were developed. These discoveries directly relate to the identified research questions of the study.

In addition to gathering survey data, interviews were conducted with the central administrators of Leader in Me “lighthouse” schools. By interviewing principals, patterns and themes that speak to the impact of Leader in Me on social-emotional skill acquisition were identified. Additionally, the administrators’ perceptions of the most and least successful parts of The Leader in Me process were determined.

Data Gathering Techniques

An Internet-based survey was used to solicit perceptions from staff members of Leader in Me lighthouse schools in the state of Illinois. The use of this survey tool helped to cast a wide net of respondents entrenched in The Leader in Me process (see Appendix H).

Principal interviews of Leader in Me lighthouse schools were also conducted. This qualitative measure allowed for the identification of themes and patterns centered around the SEL of their students (Appendix H).

Ethical Considerations

A variety of ethical safeguards were implemented to protect participants from unintended consequences and/or embarrassment.

Informed consent was not only be obtained from survey respondents but from the district administrators at participating schools and districts as well. The survey had embedded consent verification, and agreement was a necessary prerequisite for access to the survey itself.

Necessary permissions were obtained from school administrators at all participating schools. A written description of the process, survey tool, and principal interview questions was included for full transparency.

Anonymity for all participants was maintained. Names of districts, schools, and staff members were changed and coded to provide the strict anonymity of the participants.

Confidentiality was maintained for responses and observation inventories. Data collected was kept in a secure location, and this researcher had exclusive access.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive analysis was performed from school surveys. Data was averaged to describe patterns and themes around the 10 social-emotional standards in Leader in Me lighthouse schools.

Principal surveys were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and then analyzed to identify themes across the data set. Notes were available for all existing data that was used, so once completed, data used was put into a spreadsheet and coded according to various themes. Organizing data using multiple codes allowed for filtering and arranging in various chunking patterns and themes, and allowed for grouping responses together.

Identified research questions served as the basis for my initial coding framework for interview transcripts (Alexander, 2001). Next, more themes and subthemes were added, as called for by our ongoing analysis of the transcript data. The constant comparative method was used to develop the codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) so that ideas from the transcripts could be used to widen and adjust the coding system.

Conclusion

Staff surveys and principal interviews helped to shape a summative judgment of the impact Leader in Me had on the SEL of students. Ultimately, this study was used to determine the future use of Leader in Me in my school and district.

The next section of this program evaluation will outline the results of the study. This will be conducted through the context of Wagner's 4Cs framework (Wagner, 2012). The current "as-is" culture, context, conditions, and competencies will be discussed from data collected from Leader in Me schools across the county.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As-Is Analysis

Throughout my research, my primary goal was to uncover: “To what extent does participation in The Leader in Me process impact social-emotional school learning for elementary students?” By learning what elements of The Leader in Me process have the largest impact on SEL, this researcher is poised to transfer this learning to my current district to improve the instructional delivery. A variety of factors in the contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies need to be addressed for the overall improvement of SEL programming (see Appendix A). Using Wagner et al.’s “4 Cs” framework (2006) will provide an in-depth understanding of the systems in place that are producing our current reality. Wagner helps us realize that our school systems are “perfectly designed to produce the results you’re getting” (p. 106). Below, the reader will find an explanation of the current status in each of these arenas.

Context

Beyond my school district, there are cultural, political, economic, and educational factors that provide influence and impact the delivery of SEL instruction. Most notably are current events that put a spotlight on school safety. After several high-profile school shootings that received large-scale media coverage, public opinion is increasingly being shared with respect to what needs to change in our schools. No small part of the discussion is the focus on SEL. Heightened awareness of bullying, student isolation, and lack of connectedness of students is the current reality for school communities. This, in turn, favors the increased priority placed on improving SEL instruction in my district.

There are also some important factors in the educational context that merit discussion. Recently our district has gone through significant leadership changes at the highest level of the

organization. Over the last four years, the district this researcher serves had three superintendents and two interim superintendents. We now are also on our third director for special services and our third assistant superintendent for teaching and learning in four years. This is important to note because with this instability came a lack of consistency with regard to district vision, priorities, and curricular focus.

During these last several years of administrative change, we saw the closing of an area school that served as an option for students to be out-placed in more restrictive environments due to behavioral intervention needs. This led to an increase of students who might otherwise be served elsewhere. Our district saw an increased obligation to serve students with high behavioral needs within the less restrictive placement options within our school walls. The increase of students in need of consistent behavior interventions is an important factor when considering the most appropriate SEL curriculum.

Culture

Shifting mindsets, goal setting, collective responsibility, and increased confidence in serving the SEL need of our students all play into the current cultural context of my school district.

At the district level, there have not been any stated goals regarding increased or improved SEL instruction for our students. In fact, largely due to the changing administration personnel referenced above, there has been a lack of clearly defined district-level goals to rally around. Most school and district employees cannot presently identify specific district-level goals, or what is in the district mission statement. This absence of clarity, direction, and stated purpose has prevented universal buy-in and consistent communication about SEL in our district.

At my local school level, there is observational evidence to suggest that some staff members hold a somewhat traditional notion of service delivery, specifically with regard to having challenging students served in “pull out” intervention programs. Although each grade-level team is at a slightly different spot on the continuum of collective responsibility, individual and team conversations have confirmed that there is more work to be done in this area. More effective collaboration between interventionists and classroom teachers is needed to break down the obstacles of blame and passing along problems to others. A more in-depth look at the barriers to effective collaboration revealed some lack of confidence in staff ability to help the students manage their behaviors.

Competencies

Reflective discussions with the school social worker and analysis of behavioral referral data suggest that growing the capacity of my staff to manage student behaviors is needed. The capacity to deliver low-level behavioral interventions to students needs to increase. Through a needs assessment process, staff identified needing support with locating appropriate SEL lessons and resources for consistent instructional delivery. While my social worker and psychologist have extensive knowledge and a diversified repertoire of lessons and resources, general education staff have had minimal opportunity to engage with the material.

The general ability for staff members to effectively form and maintain trusting relationships with students also varies among the staff. Through teacher observation, the degree to which personal connection to students is routinely evidenced is not yet meeting expectations aligned to my vision for our school. While approximately one-third of the staff members are quite natural and effective in this area, consistency among the staff is not yet achieved.

Increasing the instructional and relationship-building capacities of the staff will be important for meaningful school improvement.

Increasing the competencies of both the students and staff are important considerations when intending to improve the overall SEL instruction of the school and district.

Conditions

Although progress on improving conditions for the improvement of SEL instruction has been made over the last two years, some fundamental changes need to be made to realize meaningful improvement.

Presently, some existing structural conditions promote successful SEL instruction in my school. These include dedicated time set aside for purposeful, explicit SEL instruction, monthly grade-level collaboration with social worker and psychologist that is centered around SEL instruction, a schoolwide small group “family” structure for every student, and the listing of SEL competencies on the district trimester report card.

Each month there is a districtwide “early release day,” where students are dismissed two hours early. Due to the shortened school day schedule, my school’s leadership team made the decision to dedicate the 50 minutes after lunch, prior to dismissal as instructional time for SEL lessons. In this way, explicit, purposeful time dedicated to SEL competencies is assured.

Additionally, in the week prior to the SEL focus lesson, the social worker and psychologist scheduled themselves into the grade-level PLC planning meeting to discuss and collaboratively plan the lesson. In this way, grade-level teams have a level of support and access to both people and material resources. Over the last year, these two professionals created a binder of resources that were aligned to each of the five SEL competencies. These were duplicated and provided to grade-level teams.

Another positive structural element was created two years ago. Our school leadership team created a schoolwide mentoring program where all of our 420 students are divided into 31 separate “families.” Each family is led by a staff member. Approximately two students from each grade, kindergarten to fifth, are in each group. These groups were created to build shared responsibility for students and to build and maintain positive relationships with students beyond individual classroom walls. The goal was to ensure that each student in the school had one staff member in addition to his or her classroom teacher as a resource, mentor, and cheerleader. We also scheduled these family meetings once per month. For scheduling reasons, these special family meetings take place on our district’s early release days. This small group, intra-grade-level structure allows for a wide variety of instructional delivery options related to SEL.

Despite these positive structural supports that we put in place, there are a few existing barriers that prevent optimal SEL programming. These limitations include a lack of common assessment measures and a lack of a consistent district curriculum.

Our school district has placed the SEL standards on the trimester report cards. This allows the language of the SEL standards to be shared routinely with the school community. It also implies that if these standards are on the report card and given a rating, there are well-developed systems to assess these standards. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Using the “If you build it, they will come” mentality, our district pushed these out, and instead of developing uniform, common assessments to measure student progress toward the standards, teachers were, in large part, left to their own devices on how to assess their students.

One of the primary reasons common assessments were not developed is because a common, universal curriculum for the delivery of SEL instruction was never adopted or

developed. This remains a significant growth opportunity for our district. Each school, and each grade level within each school for that matter, is operating as an independent island.

Clearly, there are many factors in context, culture, competencies, and conditions of my district and school than can be changed to promote improved SEL instructions for our students.

Findings

After surveying 67 school administrators, 160 certified staff members, and 25 noncertified staff members, 67% of all respondents said, The Leader in Me process positively impacts SEL (see Appendix C, *Figure 4A*). Furthermore, when asked since Leader in Me implementation if students' relationship skills have improved with respect to establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed, 60% of respondents agreed, whereas 35% strongly agreed (see Appendix C, *Figure 4B*).

Concerning students' abilities to become socially aware, specifically being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and making the best use of family, school, and community resources, 54% of respondents agreed that the social awareness of students improved. Forty-one percent of respondents strongly agreed (see Appendix C, *Figure 4C*).

The increased capacity of students' competencies is also the goal of a SEL program. With respect to increased skills achieving personal and academic goals, 45% of respondents agreed, and 53% of respondents strongly agreed that since The Leader in Me implementation, students can better demonstrate these skills (see Appendix C, *Figure 4F*).

When asked to rank the school vision's impact on school improvement, 65% of survey respondents said that it was the most impactful component of The Leader in Me process (see

Appendix C, *Figure 4D*). One principal's response aligns with these survey results as she explains the most beneficial aspects of The Leader in Me process, "It's given us a common mission. Vision. We have. A lot of things that are common in how we go about our business."

One of The Leader in Me processes requires the school staff to create an implementation plan. When asked to rank this process in order of its relative impact on school improvement, 47% indicated that it was the most impactful component (see Appendix C, *Figure 4G*).

The data above, attributing improved SEL skills to the implementation of Leader in Me, are validated by responses in principal interviews. When asked how The Leader in Me process has impacted SEL at your school, several themes emerged. Increased student leadership, development of a common language, production of good citizens, and increased problem-solving skills were identified. Each of these response themes is outlined below.

Student Leadership and Increased Confidence

In each of the interviews that were conducted with Leader in Me lighthouse-designated school principals, a positive impact on SEL was a theme. One respondent stated, "I would say that we really have focused so much of our energy on student leadership to the point where in the last three years I've increased our student leadership formal role by over 100%." Another principal explained the transfer of leadership from adults to students in this way, "The student leadership piece has been huge, and watching that transition from teachers and adults needing to be in charge, to giving it over to the students has been fun to watch." This transfer of student leadership development and the ability for teachers to release control is captured when a respondent explains:

You know, I think the fact that we all are turning things over we kids more and more you know when they sit down and talk about things it's never like oh who's going to do this.

It's like hey, can we give those to kids to do that. That's become the first thing. And the kids eat it up. I mean anything, if you offer anything, they will clamor to do it. And you know I think that's been kind of the most surprising thing here, and being able to release has not been easy for me to walk away and be like here you have it.

Increased student confidence was specifically cited by a number of principal respondents.

One says:

So, we've really done a lot of that in terms of trying to you know build kids up give them some confidence let them see that they have power and what they need to do. And it's not just you know scores with something that's done to them. You know we're in this together, and we can work through those things.

Increased student confidence was further explained this way:

They have more confidence in them themselves. They're also more self-reflective because they set goals they reflect on those goals. They decide what they're going to do differently to reach those goals. So, that's the emotional piece. . . . And then just realizing too, that they're accountable for their actions and that their happiness is up to them.

While this favorable response was universal, there was some variance on what respondents thought were the most successful parts of The Leader in Me program. While student leadership was the most frequent response, student voice, student empowerment, explicit instruction of the seven habits, and common language were all routinely mentioned.

Common Language

The interview response below is representative of many principals' perceptions of the value of The Leader in Me's common language:

I think you know the common language that they have to promote it would be a huge chunk for me that the ability to unify kids, staff, and to speak in the same terminology share has been extremely beneficial to our community. And then coupled with that is that the habits are teaching these skills to kids and they're able to apply them directly at school and at home.

Another principal states:

You know just having a common language and having the habits to refer to, and you know really set some goals with kids in regards to good behavior and academics and everything, just the consistency alone will have a positive impact, of course.

When describing the value of the language of the seven habits, a respondent describes, "The Leader in Me addresses the seven habits, and it impacts communication and listening. I do think it affects the kids in a positive way because they too have the language to talk about situations that arise."

Increased Student Voice

One of the routinely reported byproducts of The Leader in Me process was increased student voice. One principal describes:

And it's been really exciting and I get students who, you know they come up to me every day that they want to start this club and that club and they want to do that, and they want to do that, and I had a fifth-grader want to start a school newspaper for the first time, and we issued the first, sent out the first issue and they got to deliver them to each room, and the kids are just, they are like . . . They're sticking to it like glue, and they are finding their own opportunities for leadership. Now it is just such a huge thing.

This sense of student ownership is also illustrated by one respondent who said:

What I see is increased student engagement because they realize their voice matters and what they have learned from the first place. It matters because you know they make suggestions if they want things changed that they want things added and help them. And so, they are more engaged at school because they know they can make a difference.

Increased Problem-Solving Skills

In addition to the students' abilities to learn relationship skills and social awareness, students need skills in preventing and dealing with interpersonal conflict. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agreed that since Leader in Me implementation, students can better demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways. Twenty-four percent of respondents strongly agreed that students can better demonstrate these abilities (see Appendix C, *Figure 4B*).

When asked to rank The Leader in Me process components on their relative impact on school improvement, 63% of survey respondents rated direct instruction of the “seven habits” as being the most impactful (see Appendix C, *Figure 4E*). The benefit of the formal introduction of the seven habits can be seen in one principal's comments:

When they reference (students), you know, habit six and habit four, how to find win-win and synergize, and I guess habit five that they have the tools in their toolbox to solve problems on their own. And then also as things come up, they're able to go into the problem-solving process really equipped with language of how to interact with each other. And then I guess all the habits impact that.

When asked how The Leader in Me process has impacted the problem-solving skills of students, one principal responded, “I would say deeply. You know, I think our kids live the

habits, and you know, basically, it's our operating system and our philosophy. I get to see daily evidence of its success. Kiddos . . . first of all, can problem solve without the help of adults."

This general sense of increased problem-solving skills was, in part, attributed to an increased sense of self. One respondent explains, "So, to me, I've seen it a deep impact in our particular community with social-emotional education and kids being very knowledgeable about themselves and then how to interact with others around them."

Growing Citizenship

A noteworthy response theme that surfaced referenced preparing students for life away from school. While the words "college and career readiness" were not abundantly present in the responses of principal interviewees, the words "responsible citizens" and "successful future" were. Principals believed that the seven habits skill competencies would serve students well later in life. The authentic opportunities for student leadership, such as leading their parent conferences or organizing a school club, also attributed to the perception of future success. One principal directly stated, "We're doing the things that they need to do to get good citizens."

Another responded, "I believe Leader in Me really builds them. You know I believe that those skills that they are growing inside they're going to use to be successful citizens. You don't only need academics; you also have to have that social-emotional piece."

Interpretation

The survey results from the 252 respondents consisting of school administrators, certified, and noncertified staff members who favor The Leader in Me process as a vehicle to improve SEL instruction. Just over half of all the survey respondents (51%) have more than four years of experience at their perspective Leader in Me schools (see Appendix C. *Figure 4H*). These respondents have had the benefit of seeing The Leader in Me processes evolve over time

as they experienced its impact on SEL. Of the 252 total survey respondents, 96% agreed (29% said they “agreed,” while 67% said they “strongly agreed”) that The Leader in Me process positively impacts SEL at their school (see Appendix C, *Figure 4A*). The respondents were all from Leader in Me “lighthouse” schools, which by definition have earned this status. Thus, all the respondents, by their membership in these schools, have experienced success with regard to the program implementation. There is some level of public praise associated with these schools that also merits mentioning. In the context of their successful implementation, the program has been sustained and supported over many years.

Although the survey results about The Leader in Me process are very complementary and suggest overall improvement with SEL, my goal was to dig deeper to answer the secondary research questions. These include the following:

- What elements of The Leader in Me process have the largest impact on SEL?
- What elements of The Leader in Me process best prepare students for college and career readiness?
- What SEL standard is most impacted by Leader in Me process implementation?
- What elements of The Leader in Me process are perceived as most impactful by principals of lighthouse schools?

Survey results indicate that of the four Leader in Me process components (i.e., school vision, staff-created implementation, seven habits instruction, and student demonstration of leadership), school vision was perceived as being the most impactful. A total of 163 (64%) respondents rated this component as the most impactful. However, each of the three other components were nearly as favorable. Because the survey did not force respondents to choose just one of the components as most impactful, many respondents rated multiple components as

being most impactful. The detailed survey results were as follows in order of highest perceived impact:

1. school vision: all students are leaders, 65% rated as most impactful;
2. seven habits instruction, 63% rated as most impactful;
3. student demonstration of leadership (leadership notebooks, goal setting, student-led conferences), 60% rated as most impactful; and
4. staff-created implementation plan, 47% rated as most impactful.

This indicates that each of the primary components of The Leader in Me process is perceived to impact school improvement positively.

Concerning which SEL standard is most impacted by The Leader in Me process implementation, two standards were perceived to be most positively impacted by The Leader in Me process. They are listed in the order of being most “positively influenced”:

1. SEL standard 1C: Students can better demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals; 45% strongly agree, 53% agree (98% of the 252 respondents).
2. SEL standard 3C: Students can better contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community; 45% strongly agree, 53% agree (98% of the 252 respondents).

Although the two standards listed above were the highest rated in terms of most impacted by The Leader in Me process, it should be noted that all 10 SEL standards were rated highly as being positively impacted. The level of agreement for each standard ranged from a low of 88% to 98% of respondents perceiving a positive impact due to The Leader in Me process.

Respondents thought that each of the SEL competencies (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and decision-making) was positively influenced by The Leader in Me process. At least 95% of the 252 survey respondents rated all

five categories as being positively impacted. Self-awareness was the highest rated as being impacted by The Leader in Me, with 98% of the respondents agreeing about its positive impact.

The elements of The Leader in Me that are perceived to be most and least successful by building principals of lighthouse-designated schools were determined through interviews. Common themes emerged from the transcription and response analysis. When asked what the most successful elements of The Leader in Me process were, interviewees identified the following:

- student leadership and confidence,
- student empowerment/student voice,
- growing successful citizens,
- explicit seven habits instruction,
- developing a common language.

In Leader in Me schools, it is common for students to participate and take ownership of their parent-teacher conferences. Several responses related to student leadership were in this context. For example, one principal explained, “The kids are taking a portion of the conference, and they’re meeting with the teachers, and it’s just working out fantastic.”

Conversely, when interviewees were asked what elements of The Leader in Me process were least successful, the response trends identified were:

- financial commitment,
- layers of accountability with implementation,
- connection to academic measures, and
- inconsistent implementation across school/district.

Several of the interviewees elaborated on not only the financial cost of The Leader in Me process but also the accountability measures required for lighthouse designation or recertification. The financial and time resources needed were described as significant. This sentiment is captured by the following principal's response:

The least successful part of Leader in Me is some of their layers of accountability, like going through the Lighthouse process. With the showcasing of student work, you're doing at the time, that does take time and resources away from instruction with Leader in Me and also academics. And then I think the financial component is an area of growth and development (for Leader in Me) of how to make it successful for schools.

Inconsistency with regard to Leader in Me implementation was a theme that emerged from the principal interviews. While this was not a universal response, it did become clear that the lighthouse schools that had strong staff buy-in were more complimentary of Leader in Me. Principals who experienced inconsistent implementation within their school or across the district largely saw this as negative.

Recommendations

The survey and interview results from members of Leader in Me lighthouse schools across the country indicate that there is a widely perceived impact on the SEL of students. Based on these results, it is recommended that strong consideration be given to the implementation of The Leader in Me process or the process components embedded within it to improve the SEL of students in the district. This should include a shared vision in which all students are leaders, a SEL implementation plan that is created by the staff themselves, direct instruction of skills, and opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership.

To shape the context, culture, competencies, and conditions to improve SEL instruction in my school and district to realize my vision for what is “to be,” the following strategies and action steps will be utilized (diagrammed in Appendix B):

1. Collaboratively develop a school vision and mission aligned to the growth of the SEL competencies within students.
2. Develop a sense of urgency among school and district leaders around the need for comprehensive, purposeful SEL instruction for students.
3. Present research about the impact of The Leader in Me process as it relates to improved SEL of students to both parents and teachers in our school community.
4. Collaboratively create an implementation timeline for universal school district implementation of SEL curricular programming.
5. Create an ongoing professional development plan that allows for both collaborative problem-solving and sharing of successes.
6. Develop communication avenues to maximize public relations opportunities while, at the same time, offering accountability and transparency related to SEL programming.
7. Implement an assessment tool to measure student, classroom, and school growth concerning SEL.

By following the action steps above, this researcher will influence the context, culture, competencies, and conditions to make a significant improvement in the delivery of SEL skills. The vision of what is “to be” is as follows.

CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Envisioning the Success: To-Be

Once my goal of improving SEL instruction is achieved, new features of the organization will be realized. The future context, culture, competencies, and conditions will support the desired SEL instructional transformation that this researcher envisions.

Context

Evidence of success will include a context that features steadily improving behavioral data, student identification and mentorship, higher rates of student inclusion in regular education content classrooms, and an umbrella of district support for school-based SEL instruction.

Office referral data will be collected and measured for both the total number of referrals per month and the number of referrals that involve “aggressive behavior.” Improved SEL instruction will yield an environment celebrated by the meeting of schoolwide goals that reduce both numbers.

Additional evidence of our improved SEL instruction will include the creation and maintenance of a targeted student mentorship program. Having an infrastructure to support individual students who have elevated behavior needs will provide a context of tiered support to serve our school’s neediest students. Once created, this option will become a viable intervention that uses the power of relationships to encourage the implementation of SEL strategies.

Finally, our vision will be realized once we have an umbrella of districtwide support. This will include collaboration across buildings to share resources, strategies, and timelines directly related to our board of education adopting the SEL program. This new districtwide alignment will provide staff members with direction, benchmarks, and supportive networks of collaboration to serve the SEL needs of their students best.

With this new context featuring a pattern of improved behavioral data, an individualized student mentorship program, increased time spent in regular education classrooms, and districtwide program support, the SEL instruction in our school and district will be unrestrained and poised for meaningful improvement.

Culture

Improved SEL instruction will foster a culture driven by clearly defined outcomes for students, collective responsibility for all students, empowered staff problem solvers, and recognition of student and staff growth.

A clearly articulated district vision about SEL will be collaboratively developed, communicated, reinforced, repeated, and honored as a core belief in the organization. Regardless of the specific position one serves in the district, staff, and students will be able to identify the vision for SEL. Specific learning outcomes will be internalized by students. The acquisition of SEL skills will become a strong part of the identity of individual teachers and of the school as a whole. District and school pride will strengthen due to this important instructional focus that ultimately helps our students become stronger leaders.

The school culture will be transformed and characterized by a visible sense of collective responsibility for our students. Unified by a shared responsibility for enhancing the SEL competencies of our students, instructional support will not be restricted by the classroom walls. The footprint of influence each individual teacher has on the students will increase, and students will have an overlapping and blanketed support network. This network will be characterized by genuine interest, care, investment, and love for our students.

Staff members throughout the school and district will feel increasingly empowered and responsible for the social-emotional growth of our students with high behavioral needs. This will

be evidenced by a decreased reliance on our mental health professionals to provide both preventative and on-the-spot crisis support.

The desired culture will also be evidenced by the routine recognition and celebration of the instructional growth of teachers and the measured growth of students. A safe and trusting school culture will enable staff to share their struggles openly, gain support and guidance from colleagues, and celebrate personal growth and that of their colleagues. These small, but routine, celebrations will further promote and embed this desired culture to define the “way things get done” in our district.

Competencies

The central competencies that improved SEL instruction will include an expanded repertoire of resources, lessons, and activities directly aligned to the SEL standards, increased opportunity for teacher-student relationship building, the emergence of district and building leaders for SEL instruction, and universal implementation of high-leverage self-regulation strategies.

Growing the instructional capacity among the school and district staff will be aided by the creation of grade-level resource deposits that are sorted by each of the five SEL competencies. These shared resources will allow staff members collaboratively to plan, deliver, then reflect on the lessons with shared outcomes. The common resources will also allow for the creation of common assessments to evaluate the SEL growth of individual students.

With improved SEL instruction, staff members establish clear avenues for relationship building with students. Increased effort and time allocation will be prioritized for this purpose. The explicit teaching of SEL skills will enable staff to know students at a deeper level than previously achieved. With the district and school mission supporting this effort, the importance

of building and maintaining caring and trusting relationships will be increasingly understood and valued. Staff members will share and celebrate successful attempts to connect with students who have historically been difficult to reach. Systematic reflection of teacher-student relationships at grade-level collaboration meetings will identify isolated students. Staff will then action plan and hold one another accountable for the formation of trusting teacher-student relationships for these identified students.

Teacher leaders with natural strengths and passion in this area will emerge. These staff members will be nurtured and encouraged to develop their leadership capacity and take on supportive roles in service to their peers. In this way, the staff support network will grow, and at the same time, the desired culture of shared leadership and empowerment will be realized.

Finally, a core set of high-leverage strategies to help students regulate their own behavior will be compiled, shared, and modeled with the staff. This handful of strategies will become universally accessible throughout the building. Students will have these schoolwide strategies in their personal “toolbox” for times requiring emotional regulation. These tools will provide a common language for students, staff, and parents in our collaboration to enhance the SEL competencies.

Building of resources, strengthening teacher-student relationships, creating teacher leaders, and developing schoolwide tools are competencies that will grow as our vision of improved SEL instruction comes to fruition.

Conditions

The conditions that are positively influenced by improved SEL programming include frequent, dedicated time for instruction, 100% of staff have a role in supporting SEL, weekly team collaboration, and aligning initiatives to articulated SEL goals clearly.

Intentional planning of schoolwide blocks dedicated to SEL instruction is a condition that helps hold us all accountable to our mission. Reserving the first 30 minutes of every day, and one 50-minute period per month for this purpose sets a clear expectation and prioritizes the content. Additionally, the shared instructional blocks encourage collaboration among peers for effective SEL-related lesson planning. Setting aside the time has ensured that this remains a priority in our school, and the content is less easily skipped over or marginalized.

Common grade-level planning times will be increasingly represented by SEL-related discussions. Having the weekly planning period protected by the master schedule allows teachers collaboratively to plan, implement, assess, and analyze the acquisition of SEL skills. Having this as a standing agenda item also ensures routine focus and a consistent presence in the weekly lesson plans.

Having every support staff member assigned to a specific grade-level support role during SEL instruction confirms the importance of the work while creating an “all hands on deck” mentality. This purposeful design is a condition that supports the overall instruction of SEL skills.

With the strong focus and deserved attention that SEL instruction is given, it becomes a lens by which other initiatives are filtered and evaluated. Because growing SEL competencies in our students are central to our district and school mission, it drives other chosen initiatives. Implementation decisions are made based on the degree they align and support our published SEL goals.

Improved SEL instruction helps to create the conditions that perpetuate its desired success. Specifically, the dedication of instructional time, providing routine team collaboration,

allocating support staff to assist grade levels, and aligning building initiatives are all conditions that support this SEL instructional transformation.

Having outlined the desired “to-be” context, conditions, culture, and competencies in this researcher’s current district, a discussion of specific skills and strategies to reach this desired state follows.

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

To arrive at the reality of transformed SEL instruction in my district, specific strategies need to be employed to influence the current context, culture, competencies, and conditions. The primary areas for change are outlined below and are aligned to each of these four domains.

The conditions that are currently present in the district do not promote effective and comprehensive SEL instruction for students. Whereas presently, a district-adopted kindergarten through grade eight curriculum does not exist, one needs to be vetted, piloted, and ultimately adopted. The inconsistent effort, time, and focus on SEL at each grade level, school, and across the district, in general, provide vastly different experiences for students in the same district boundary. Because different content is being delivered at some grade levels and in some buildings, the assessments by which students and teachers are being held accountable also greatly vary. Forming a districtwide SEL steering committee to research and adopt a curriculum that allows students at every grade level to be engaged with the SEL standards is necessary. The creation of a scope and sequence for each of the grade levels will allow for consistency of content coverage. This will provide some curricular equity both within the building and among the schools in the district. Grade-level teams with members from each district school need collaboratively to develop assessments that will be commonly used for the same purpose. These strategies will help transform the current conditions of fragmentation into conditions that encourage and promote SEL instruction that our district's students need and deserve. Daily, weekly, and monthly times dedicated to SEL instruction will be honored by all grade levels at all schools. Most importantly the instruction and assessments will be aligned across the district.

A supportive culture needs to be developed to influence the current district's conditions. Currently, the district as a whole does not value SEL instruction. There is a lack of collective

responsibility for students, and teachers lack the confidence to independently handle the behavior of difficult students. A newly created and articulated district vision needs to drive the necessary cultural shift. Clearly defined systems for staff members to take shared ownership of not just academic, but also for the social-emotional success of students will be developed. Instructional coaching and grade-level collaboration will be targeted at meeting the behavioral challenges of the students that we serve. These strategies will help us to establish SEL instruction as a priority that is confirmed in our vision. A culture of shared responsibility of students where staff collaborate and support one another will be realized. The instructional capacity of individual staff members will be increased along with the confidence necessary to support the varying needs of our students best.

Some specific district competencies need to be identified for staff development for the SEL focus and implementation to materialize. Presently, school and district staff have widely varying understandings of the best practices related to SEL instruction. No small part of this is due to the lack of uniform understanding and acceptance of the power of student relationships. For these capacities within our staff to grow, both meaningful collaboration and staff development are needed. Once staff members learn and share effective SEL instructional strategies with one another, the collective repertoire of best practices to support students will grow rapidly. A specific focus on this collaboration will be centered on ways to build and maintain trusting relationships with students. Collecting, sharing, and celebrating these instructional strategies and resources will allow for the long-term maintenance of these important competencies.

The present context of SEL instruction in the district is one of complacency and stagnation. Discipline referrals have remained relatively constant over several years. Patterns of

passing on the task of improving student behaviors to others are too common. To combat this, students and staff will be engaged in the individual and grade-level goal-setting process to reduce the number of discipline referrals. Additionally, training specifically relating to making classrooms more inclusive will be provided. Embedded within this process will be site visits to classrooms that are regarded highly concerning including students with high behavioral needs. These efforts will help to redefine the context into one where discipline data clearly and consistently trend positive, and where 100% of students are included in meaningful mutually beneficial ways.

Appendix C summarizes the current conditions, culture, competencies, and context of the district and the strategies that bridge the district to the desired future. Next, this researcher will outline specific actions that will be used for each of the strategies previously discussed.

Strategies and Action

For each of the 10 identified strategies, several specific actions need to be conducted to achieve the desired exceptional SEL instruction for all students. These actions are intended to positively influence the conditions, culture, competencies, and context currently present in the district. Each of the strategies and subsequent actions is outlined below:

- For collaborative teams to develop and share effective strategies for explicit SEL instruction, some new practices need to be instituted. First, grade-level PLC meeting agendas will include a standing item related to sharing SEL strategies, activities, and resources. When developing individual school improvement plans, a schedule of individual grade-level spotlight sessions and gallery walks will be created. This will ensure that explicit time is devoted to the sharing of resources and holds all staff accountable. Because all staff will know their expectation to present to their strategies,

activities, and resources to the staff, it holds everyone accountable for this process. Each grade level will be given a specific date for their presentation, and by year's end, each grade-level team will have had the opportunity to both share and learn from one another. To achieve these strategies, activities, and resources, staff will be asked to upload them to a shared folder that is accessible not only to the school-level employees but to district-level staff as well.

- The importance of building and maintaining trusting relationships with students will be achieved by presenting compelling data that support it and by sharing a variety of examples of ways for district personnel to do it. Research regarding the impact and importance of relationships is plentiful. The most compelling statistics and quotes will be gathered and presented to all district staff members. To confirm the district's focus and seriousness about this, a list of 10 specific activities that can help build relationships will be compiled and shared with instructional staff members. Instead of simply giving staff the list of strategies, live or video-based models of staff using this activity will be provided. Finally, a districtwide timeline for staff members' introduction of these activities with students will be drafted. This will provide a common foundation for discussion and collaboration around building and maintaining trusting relationships with students.
- A new district vision will be created that validates the importance of SEL instruction. This is no small task and no overnight process. To do this, the superintendent, along with district principals and supporting administrators, will hold discussion forums with students, staff, and the families of the district. The identified outcome of these forums will be to identify common themes about the purpose and goals in our district. Once

identified, these themes will be used as the driver of a strategic planning process that district administration will thoroughly develop.

- Systems allowing staff members to take collective responsibility for students will be developed. Each building will develop a schoolwide mentoring program for its students. By dividing the student body into small families with a “mentor” staff member, an additional adult aside from the student’s teacher will be identified as a support person for each student. District principals will charge grade-level teachers to work smarter and to group students across classroom walls for both academic and SEL instructional purposes. This will create an environment of shared responsibility for the success of each child.
- Instructional coaching and round table discussions will be used to increase the staff members’ capacity to handle and manage difficult behaviors effectively. This will include a few different layers of support. First, the special service interventionists throughout the district will be scheduled to collaborate on a monthly basis. The purpose of these meetings will be to reflect and discuss some of the most difficult behaviors that occurred during the previous month. This timely sharing of ideas for the district’s most highly trained personnel will be brought back to the building level. Second, an online form will be created that will give staff members an anonymous opportunity to share difficulties and seek solutions. This “I need help with . . .” form will be accessible to staff at a districtwide level and allow for staff members across the district to offer tips and strategies. District principals will provide specific staff development, seeking outside resources when necessary, to support staff members with the management of difficult student behaviors.

- A districtwide SEL steering committee will be developed and charged with the research, vetting, piloting, and ultimately recommending of a curriculum for board adoption. Special service and general education team members will be invited from each building to serve on this committee. District administrators will facilitate the bringing in of representatives from highly regarded SEL curriculum writers. A matrix of pros and cons will be created and compared to the identified needs articulated by committee members. A timeline with decision benchmarks for this process will be developed and shared with all district staff members.
- The creation and/or identification of common assessments for the SEL standards will be developed by grade-level teams. This process will greatly reduce the fragmentation and increase the consistency of how students' SEL competencies are being measured. Time will be secured on district institute days to ensure participation and accountability from all grade-level teachers from all buildings. A clear SEL assessment calendar will be developed that will ensure consistency across the district. This will include student self-reporting surveys at both the beginning and end of the year, teacher observation, and the use of a universal screener for all students. With the help of SEL assessment software (e.g., Panorama, Tesseract, DESSA), data will be collected and analyzed at the student, classroom, and school level. These data will be used for individual student goal setting and school improvement planning by individual grade-level teams and schools.
- Staff and students will be engaged in the goal-setting process for reducing the number of office referrals related to discipline. Both school-level and specific grade-level discipline data will be compiled and presented to the staff by building principals. Principals will collaborate with grade-level teams to draft measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely

goals specific to their students' needs. Templates for individual student goal setting on behavior will be collaboratively developed and shared with staff members across the district.

- Professional development concerning inclusive classrooms will be provided to district staff members. This professional development will include sending a representative group from each school to a highly regarded inclusive classroom both in and out of the district. To do this, district-level administrators will research area district practices related to including all students in the regular education environment. Principals will identify leaders in their respective buildings who have successfully managed difficult behaviors in the regular education environment. Finally, a timeline for professional development will be created that presents and models the strategies and practices that have been effective.
- A professional development plan will include ongoing professional development about The Leader in Me process by Franklin Covey. This will include staff training designed for schools in the early stages of implementation. Support for school administration and the school leadership team will be achieved through collaboration and networking with other schools in similar stages of program implementation.

Appendix D summarizes these strategies and actions. It is through these ten strategies and defined action steps that this researcher will positively transform the SEL instruction in my district. This desired change will be done systematically, over time, by influencing the existing conditions, culture, competencies, and context of the district.

The analysis of the skills and strategies to achieve improved social-emotional skills instruction for students has allowed me to reflect on a wider, more global scale about

improvements in our educational system. The section that follows describes the policy advocacy for increased focus and accountability for improved SEL in schools.

CHAPTER SEVEN: POLICY ADVOCACY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through personal experience as an Illinois educator for over 20 years, along with the review of literature related to SEL, my beliefs about the importance of its implementation have been affirmed. Students are coming to our public schools differently than they did in the past. According to Ravitch (2014), “It is a different world now. Teachers may have students in their classes who have mental or emotional disabilities or behavior problems, who speak little or no English, or whole life in extreme poverty and may be homeless” (p. 243).

In addition to the increased variety of student needs that come to today’s teachers, societal demands of its future workforce have evolved dramatically. Tony Wagner outlines what he calls the seven “survival skills” to close the global achievement gap. He defines this in the following way:

the global achievement gap, as I’ve come to call it—the gap between what even our best suburban, urban, and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what all students will need to succeed as learners, workers and citizens in today’s global knowledge economy. (Wagner, 2008, p. 8)

The seven survival skills are listed below:

- critical thinking and problem-solving,
- collaboration and leading by influence,
- agility and adaptability,
- initiative and entrepreneurialism,
- effective oral and written communication,
- assessing and analyzing information, and
- curiosity and imagination.

One can see that of the skills listed above, very little has to do with the depth of content in subject areas that were historically emphasized in schools. Instead, our graduates will need a strong foundation of what, at times, is referred to as “soft skills” or “the hidden curriculum.” SEL skills help students be more effective individually and within group settings.

More than ever, this researcher advocates for a more comprehensive SEL implementation policy that mandates the annual assessment of the Illinois SEL standards but also improves the teacher preparation to foster effectively the social-emotional growth of students K-12. The present focus of teacher certification standards in the United States is on developing the cognitive components associated with teaching, with very little attention being given to the social-emotional development of teachers or their understanding of these skills in students (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004). Better preparing teachers while at the same time holding school districts accountable for compliance with the Illinois State Learning Standards through assessment, will ultimately increase student well-being in our schools.

While Illinois was the first state to adopt preschool through high school SEL standards, state policy undervalues its importance with a lack of meaningful implementation accountability. The Children’s Mental Health Act of 2013 included guidelines for incorporating social and emotional development into school learning standards and educational programs in Section 15. It states, “The Illinois State Board of Education shall develop and implement a plan to incorporate social and emotional development standards as part of the Illinois Learning Standards to enhance and measure children’s school readiness and ability to achieve academic success.” Further, it states, “Every Illinois school district shall develop a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into the district’s educational program” (405 ILCS 49/Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003).

While the language certainly encourages school districts to value the Illinois SEL Standards, it does not go nearly far enough to ensure the content is delivered to the students who so drastically need it. Instead, as with the case of my current school district, policy at the local level is watered down with ambiguity, vagueness, and administrative discretions and latitude.

District Policy 6:65 Student Social and Emotional Development states, “The superintendent shall incorporate SEL into the district’s curriculum and other educational programs consistent with the district’s mission and the goals of benchmarks of the Illinois Learning Standards.” From there, it provides a list of what the incorporation of SEL objectives into the district’s curriculum “may” include.

It has been my experience that what gets measured gets done. Presently, there is a short supply of processes and tools to measure effectively the social-emotional skills in students. The development of SEL assessment is worthy of investment. According to McKown (2017), “Developing and validating rigorous assessments will strengthen SEL efforts across the board, from policy to classroom practice” (p. 173). In this same policy briefing from Princeton University’s “The Future of Children,” McKown points out, “At the same time, the vast majority of American teacher -preparation programs neither require nor offer coursework on how to teach social and emotional skills.”

It is for these reasons that this researcher advocates for policy to include the following requirements:

- All teacher preparation programs will require a course in SEL to meet certification standards.
- All schools K-12 will integrate SEL into the curriculum and be assessed annually to determine the social and emotional well-being of all students.

Next, this researcher will analyze the educational, economic, social, political, and moral/ethical dimensions of this policy change.

Educational Analysis

Interventions that address the five competencies of SEL increased students' academic performance by 11 percentage points compared to students who did not participate in such SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition, the SEL programs also reduced aggression and emotional distress among students, increased helping behaviors in school, and improved positive attitudes toward self and others. These findings were from a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs that spanned 30 years of research.

The authors of the 2011 meta-analysis have completed a new meta-analysis (2017) published in the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development*. This large-scale study analyzed results from 82 different interventions involving more than 97,000 students from kindergarten to high school. In this study, however, the effects were assessed 6 months to 18 years after the programs ended. The findings were that school-based SEL interventions continue to benefit students for months and even years to come. Specifically, the research unveiled the following results (Taylor et al., 2017):

- SEL continued to boost student well-being in the form of greater social and emotional competencies, prosocial behavior, and prosocial attitudes.
- SEL participants later demonstrated a 6% increase in high school graduation rates and an 11% increase in college graduation rates.
- SEL participants were less likely to have a clinical mental health disorder, ever be arrested, or become involved with the juvenile justice system, and had lower rates of

sexually transmitted infections and pregnancies (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017).

Schools are the ideal institutions for fostering children's social, emotional, and academic development. The three are inherently linked. Promoting social and emotional competencies within students can encourage their academic engagement, work ethic, and school success (Zins & Elias, 2006). An extensive body of research indicates that when students effectively master social-emotional competencies, they also have greater well-being and school performance (Greenberg et al., 2003). Through this educational lens, policy to strengthen the implementation and accountability for SEL instruction is warranted.

Economic Analysis

There are significant costs to the district associated with the implementation of SEL districtwide. Often, we view things immediately from the initial cost factor; however, it is important to consider the potential future savings or return on investment. The positive outcomes of SEL implementation can often be translated into substantial monetary benefits for students and for society as a whole. However, the initial investment is not small.

Concerning assessment development, a consortium of foundations has come together as the Funders' Collaborative for Innovative Measurement. One member concluded:

It is reasonable to assume that we need an investment comparable to that required to create rigorous, scalable, and useful assessment systems for an academic content area spanning early childhood through high school. It was noted that it took hundreds of millions of dollars to develop PARCC tests used to assess progress toward Common Core Standards. (McKown, 2017)

While that figure may be grandiose given its scope, the development of meaningful assessment in this area would take the allocation of time from committed educators at the state and district levels over what would likely be several years. However, the current reality is that SEL resources are varied, and many operate without common resources to guide them.

Costs associated with a core tier-one program for SEL instruction are also considerable. For districts such as mine, without a common board-adopted curriculum from which to teach the standards, curricular resources would need to be vetted and ultimately adopted. From there, professional development would be required not only for the teaching but also for the assessment of the standards. While hard to generalize, specific costs would be consistent with that of a curricular adoption in a core academic content area.

Through a cost-benefit economic analysis, investing in SEL has a strong return on investment. A research team from Columbia University found that, on average, every dollar invested in SEL programming yields \$11 in long-term benefits, ranging from reduced juvenile crime and higher lifetime earnings to better mental and physical health (Belfield et al., 2015). That figure arises from fewer negative outcomes such as substance use and delinquency and increased positive outcomes such as academic achievement and social skills.

For example, in “Promoting Positive Youth Development Through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects,” students who received SEL later demonstrated a 6% increase in high school graduation rates, and an 11% increase in college graduation rates. According to this study, a student who graduates from high school has a lifetime income benefit of \$367,687, and the prevention of a single case of conduct disorder saves society nearly \$4 million (Taylor et al., 2017).

Social Analysis

Looking at SEL policy and advocacy through a social lens, we must realize the outcomes of positive social behavior and interpersonal skills. Students who received the SEL curriculum and instruction were reported by fellow students, teachers, parents, and independent observers to get along better with their peers (Durlak et al., 2011). In my experience as a classroom teacher and building principal, this researcher has seen directly how interpersonal relationships; student to student, student to teacher, and teacher to teacher; not only impact the school culture, but also drive connection, authenticity, and engagement. This can lead to better academic performance and social and emotional well-being in school. Strong interpersonal relationships lead to developing a healthy sense of self, increased self-confidence and, therefore, a reduction in students feeling isolated or withdrawn.

Viewing SEL programming in schools from a social analysis can potentially reframe the traditional thinking on the real purpose of schooling. Instead of teaching content coverage, the focus shifts to growing individuals who communicate, solve problems, and collaborate with others.

Perceptions from Tony Wagner about the survival skills lacking in the future workforce also suggest that timing is right for a shift. Research combined with current federal legislation ESSA has yielded more and more attention being turned toward SEL skills and competencies. It would appear that the present time is prime time for states and districts alike to implement SEL standards, assessment, and teacher preparation policy.

Political Analysis

Recently, SEL has gained momentum as ESSA has helped to legitimize schools taking the time and devoting resources to teaching the whole child, with more value being placed on

SEL skills and competencies. Schools are turning their attention toward SEL for a variety of reasons. Schools are seeking out SEL programs to:

increase academic success and, somewhat ironically, to lower the stress levels of students as they strive toward that success; to prevent negative behaviors such as drug use, violence, and bullying; to equip students with the ‘soft skills’ they will need in today’s work environment; and to promote positive relationships and attitudes about school.

(Zakrzewski, 2015)

Standardized testing for core academic areas has put pressure on school districts to devote resources to math and reading content. Because these content areas are being measured, they are getting taught explicitly. Politically, these scores are important because they are what the public sees. Politicians who campaign on school reform use these numbers to influence their agendas. In this era of standardized testing and accountability, high stakes curricular demands that are being measured and reported upon have taken priority over SEL implementation and measurement. Compliance with existing SEL policy at both district and state levels is spotty at best (Correa, 2017).

Moral and Ethical Analysis

When one considers the students who are most often underserved due to poverty, it is these students who have much to gain. As an educator for over 20 years, this researcher sleeps well at night knowing that students are served with the very best effort and intentions. The research around SEL is compelling. Implementing SEL into the curriculum is what children deserve. Fostering growth in the SEL competencies will help to make them more successful and prepared for their future.

We owe it to prospective teachers to give them a realistic picture of the students they will serve. We also owe it to them to equip them with the best tools to meet the increasingly high demands that will be placed upon them. As teachers are leaving the profession in high numbers due to burnout, fatigue, and the heavy weight of the tasks before them, better preparation can help. As educators, we owe it to the profession to continually improve, evolve, and adapt.

With the proper emphasis placed on the assessment of SEL skills, we can help our students to develop the survival skills to compete in tomorrow's world. As we continue to prepare our students to succeed personally and professionally in the 21st century and beyond, we must incorporate effective, research-based, social-emotional programming in the curriculum. As with any area of competence that we want our students to improve upon, we must advocate for what is best for students, and in this case, that means advocating for implementation and measurement of SEL competencies, leading by example, and prioritizing our moral and ethical obligation to do right by kids and teachers.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

A change in policy that impacts both the teacher certification and the annual assessment requirements will have some implications for both staff and community relationships.

Staff relationships can serve as a vehicle for assessment development. High performing teams collaborate to build common assessments. Once common assessments are created or defined at each grade level, the critical work of the teaming process can begin. Specifically, teaching staff can have conversations centered around the data. Teachers can learn from one another as they compare results from their common SEL assessments. This will ultimately influence the teaching practices in a positive way as the staff members who are most successful can share strategies that produce the best results. The success of this process is reliant on strong

staff relationships that are built upon trust and openness. It requires the best interest of the students to take center stage and for the walls of independent operating and functioning classrooms to come down. Ironically, it will require staff members to demonstrate strong SEL competencies with working and relating to one another so that they can best serve the students concerning this critically important work.

This policy change will also have some implications for the community. Appropriate emphasis on the SEL standards has traditionally not been a reality. Many of the parents of our school-age kids did not grow up in schools that addressed SEL skills and strategies explicitly and purposefully. This implies that some education around SEL skills, competencies, and the need for them will be critical for the community. Parents and families of our students will need to embrace and support the need for increased SEL accountability, both with regard to teacher preparedness and with increased assessment in schools. Once parents realize the value of investing in SEL skills, the community's support and partnership can help hold the students, teachers, and schools accountable for the attainment of skills.

Additionally, there are some policy implications for the business community. Because SEL skills are so closely linked to the essential skills that Wagner describes for the future workers (Wagner, 2008), there is great incentive to have community and business support and sponsorship of SEL-related instruction and assessment. It is truly to everyone's advantage to have high school and college graduates with higher levels of SEL proficiency. The success in their future employment will depend on it.

Having outlined policy recommendations for improved SEL through an educational, economic, social, political, and moral/ethical lens, the final section will summarize this program evaluation.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The role of SEL in education has never been more important. To prepare our current learners for the future demands of the workplace, and life in general, social-emotional skills must be developed. The discovery of The Leader in Me process provided enthusiasm for an approach that developed social-emotional competencies while, at the same time, preparing students with the 21st-century skills to be successful in the future.

The purpose of this program evaluation of Leader in Me was to determine the impact of using this process. Specifically, this researcher explored how participation in The Leader in Me process influenced SEL for elementary school students, how it impacted the climate of the school, and how it prepared students for academic progress and future success in college and the workplace.

Even though The Leader in Me is an identifiable structure in over 3000 schools, there is a lack of scholarly research to validate the significant financial investment of implementation. The review of literature summarizing research findings related to the seven habits of highly effective people, SEL, best practices in program implementation, the acquisition of essential life skills, and skills and competencies necessary for skills in the workplace confirmed my beliefs about the need for change in the way we prepare our students in public schools.

Discussion

By surveying the over 250 staff members of schools that have high-level implementation of The Leader in Me process, this researcher was able to collect and analyze perceptions about the impact it had on the SEL of students. Conducting, transcribing, and analyzing principal

interviews provided important context around the implementation of The Leader in Me, its impact on SEL, and perceptions about its preparation for future college and career success.

Respondents overwhelmingly believed that Leader in Me implementation positively impacted the social-emotional development of students (67%). Interviewees cited increased student leadership, student confidence, increased student voice, student empowerment, the explicit teaching of the seven habits, and the use of a common leadership language as benefits of The Leader in Me process. An overall increase in the students' problem-solving skills was also reported by those interviewed in this program evaluation. Growth in citizenship was also a common perception that surfaced through the interviews.

This analysis of Leader in Me in schools across the country encouraged the reflection of the current state of SEL in this researcher's current district (as-is). The reported benefits of Leader in Me implementation, coupled with the in-depth review of literature in this program review, suggested changes to be made to realize the possible "to-be" in the district's future. Using the "4 Cs" context, a "to-be" analysis was completed, identifying possibilities for the district. The analysis set the stage for several strategies and actions to improve the delivery and impact of SEL. They include:

- sharing of SEL strategies and resources,
- building and maintaining trusting relationships with students,
- inclusion of SEL in the district's vision,
- systems for the collective responsibility of students,
- instructional coaching,
- development of a district SEL steering committee,
- creation of common assessments aligned to SEL standards,

- goal setting related to behavioral office referrals, and
- professional development of inclusive classrooms and seven habits skill instruction.

On a broader scale beyond the researcher's current district, this program evaluation led to policy advocacy in the area of SEL. This researcher advocates for a more comprehensive SEL implementation policy that mandates the annual assessment of the Illinois SEL Standards, but also improves the teacher preparation to effectively foster the social-emotional growth of students K-12. The present focus of teacher certification standards in the United States is on developing the cognitive components associated with teaching, with very little attention being given to the social-emotional development of teachers or their understanding of these skills in students (Gomez et al., 2004). Better preparing teachers while, at the same time, holding school districts accountable for compliance with the Illinois State Learning Standards through assessment, will ultimately increase student well-being in our schools.

The positive social-emotional impact cannot be understated. Interventions that address the five competencies of SEL increased students' academic performance by 11 percentage points compared to students who did not participate in such SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). In addition, the SEL programs also reduced aggression and emotional distress among students, increased helping behaviors in school, and improved positive attitudes toward self and others. These findings were from a meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs that spanned 30 years of research. For this reason, improved SEL for students is a goal worth fighting for.

Leadership Lessons

Reflecting upon this research study has allowed me to look closely at my own leadership strengths, best practices for school improvement, and my role as an educational leader in the

advocacy to improve education. Several leadership lessons have surfaced throughout this program evaluation. They include:

- Significant change takes time and persistence.
- Good systems lead to good practices.
- Responsibility for advocacy is inherent in educational leadership.
- Understanding the organization's culture, context, conditions, and climate is critical for change implementation.

While my initial excitement about The Leader in Me process was obvious, I learned the value of slowing down and including a wide base of respondents into the research process. By connecting with principals across the country who were deeply entrenched in The Leader in Me process, it allowed for a deep understanding and for common themes to develop. Taking the time to connect with principals provided an honest and authentic perspective in a way that survey data could not. When, at times, I know that I can act quickly in my excitement, this experience stuck with me and reminds me of the value of taking it slowly. The qualitative data analysis process, while laborious and slow, was very rewarding, as it provided voice and perspective from those closest to the program.

Another lesson that surfaced was the importance of building a strong system to support sustained change. "If you build it, they will come," is a common mantra that often refers to systemizing practices in education. In this case, reviewing the literature on best practices for program implementation greatly informed the system for improved social-emotional improvement. Successful implementation of SEL requires a cycle of continual improvement. This includes:

- following a purposeful, well-conceived plan;

- starting small with a commitment to expand through ongoing development;
- measuring implementation fidelity to understand what has happened in an intervention and to enhance service delivery; and
- assessing SEL outcomes.

Phasing in implementation gradually while, at the same time, supporting teachers is a model to aspire to. Schools that have successfully implemented SEL programs have started with pilot projects, examined them thoroughly, and then committed to ongoing development (Merrell & Gueldner, 2010; Van Velsor, 2009).

The importance of advocacy is another leadership lesson that became evident throughout this program evaluation. As an educational leader, part of our professional responsibility is to use our influence and advocate for our stakeholders and the profession in general. Through my doctoral research and policy advocacy, I realized that we, as educators, are the ones in the position to influence change. Furthermore, being a passive participant in educational leadership may be safe but begs the question of what degree of leadership it really is. In my discussions with and observation of prestigious area superintendents, I realized how active they are in influencing policy at the school, district, state, and national levels. This has made me realize that if we as educational leaders are not advocating for what we believe is right, and for how to improve our educational system, it will not just “happen.” In other words, “If not us, . . . then who?” My takeaway is the importance of this duty to advocate for our kids, families, and our profession.

One final key leadership lesson is that before you can understand where to go, you need to understand where you are. To be an effective leader, one needs to understand Wagner’s (2012) 4 Cs: culture, context, conditions, and climate. Understanding the “as-is” is important to

effecting positive change. With knowledge of existing strengths, stakeholders are better prepared to embrace new ideas and programs. Without taking the time to understand such knowledge, a leader may be destined to repeat previous mistakes by not addressing the deeply embedded beliefs or practices in culture, context, conditions, or competencies within the district. As a leader, I now know that I can create positive change only after I understand the four Cs and their impact on one another.

Conclusion

John Dewey (1944) is widely credited with saying, “If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow” (p. 167). Despite that John Dewey died over 65 years ago, the slowness of the educational change process in a rapidly changing world is well captured in his words. Whereas education has historically centered on content knowledge and prioritized reading, writing, and arithmetic, today’s learners need and deserve the development of SEL skills. A systemic change in educational priorities is needed, one that affirms the reality that the world is different, one that grants social and emotional skills equal importance to traditional academic content; in other words, one that gives all students a real chance at success. While no single program is perfect, there are many that attempt to deliver students the skills needed to be successful in the future. The Leader in Me process founded on Steven Covey’s seven habits attempts to do just that.

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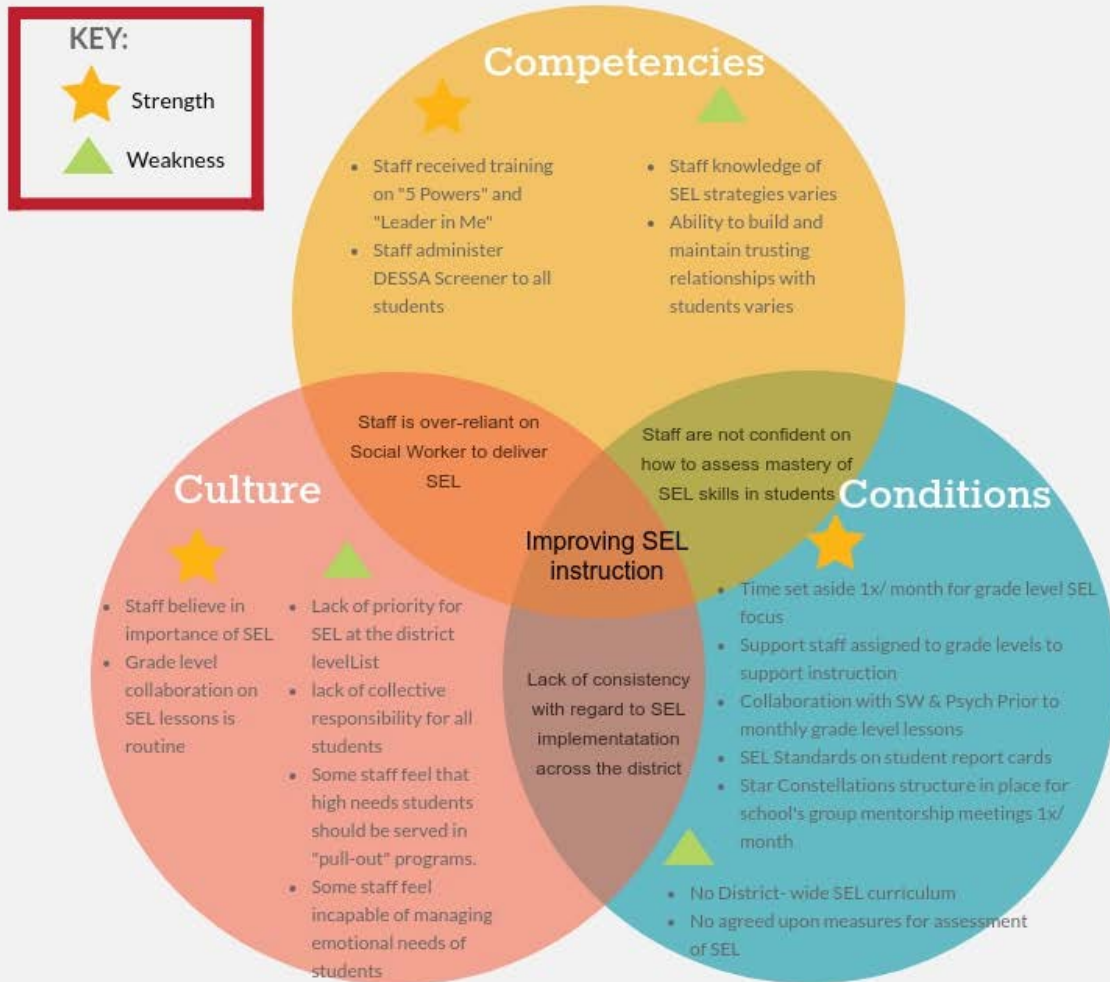
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Appendix A: Name of Appendix

David J. Danielski- 4 C's Diagram Improving Instruction of SEL Skills



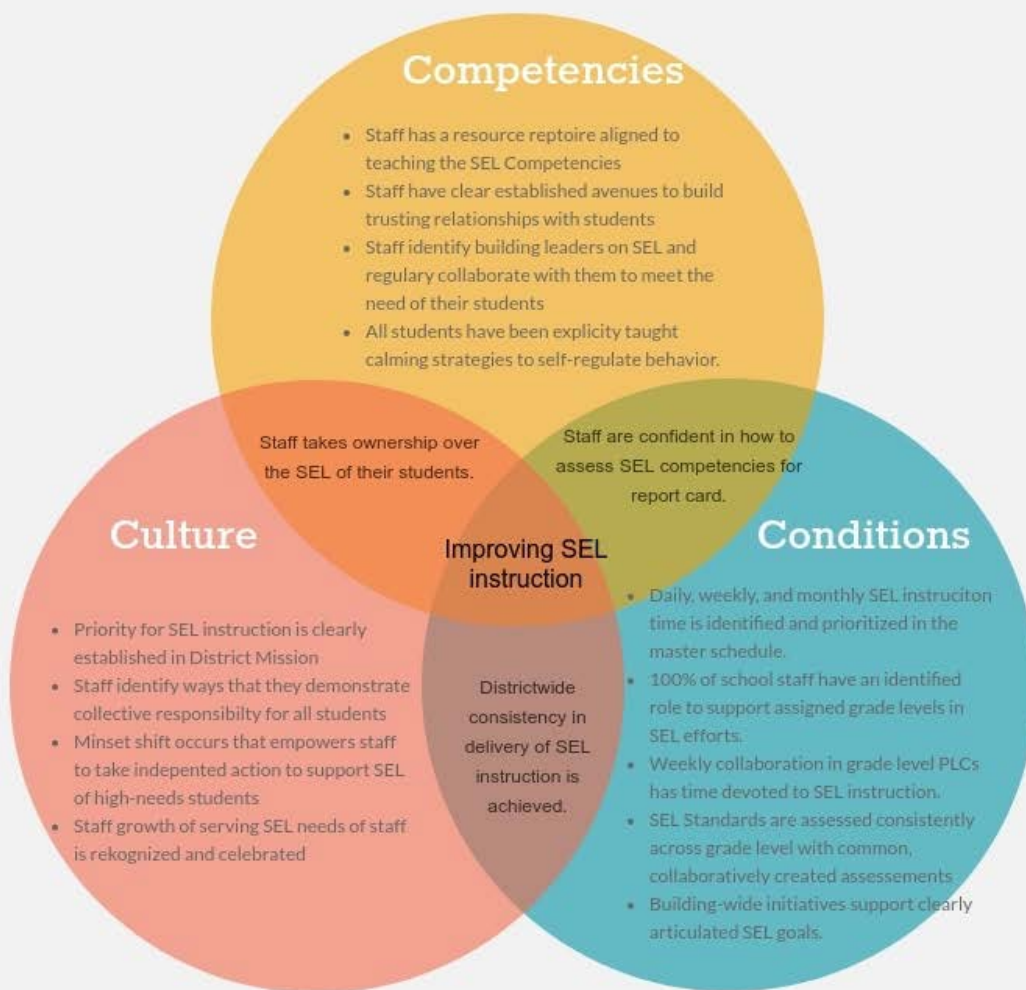
Context:

- The frequency and severity of student office referrals has remained consistent over a period of 3 years
- Each year, one or two "bullying" type behaviors impact the learning of small groups of students.
- A district SEL Steering Committee has met for several years, with changing leadership each year due to staff turnover in upper level administration
- Increased numbers of high emotional needs students are being served in home schools due to recent closing of ED out of district placement
- Expectations of inclusion of high emotional needs students has increased whereas increased instructional minutes are being allocated to core regular ed. classrooms.



Appendix B: Name of Appendix

David J. Danielski- "To Be" Improving Instruction of SEL Skills



Context:

- Behavioral data shows consistent decrease in office referrals for student behavior.
- Specific, at-risk students are identified, mentored, and given leadership roles within the school.
- Districtwide SEL Steering Committee regularly meets and supports the efforts of our school.
- Less students are served by outside placements because the capacity to serve high needs students has steadily increased over time.
- The frequency and duration of student being included in core homeroom classes with grade level peers has steadily increased over time.



Appendix C: Findings and Figures

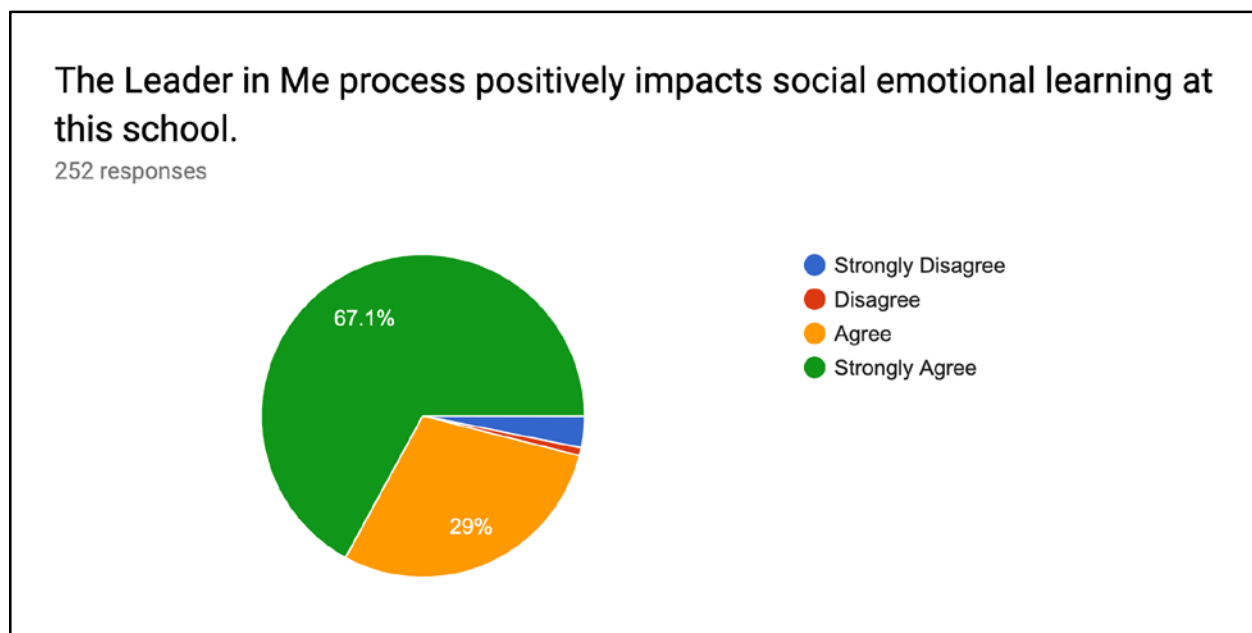


Figure 4A. Leader in Me's impact on social-emotional learning at school site.

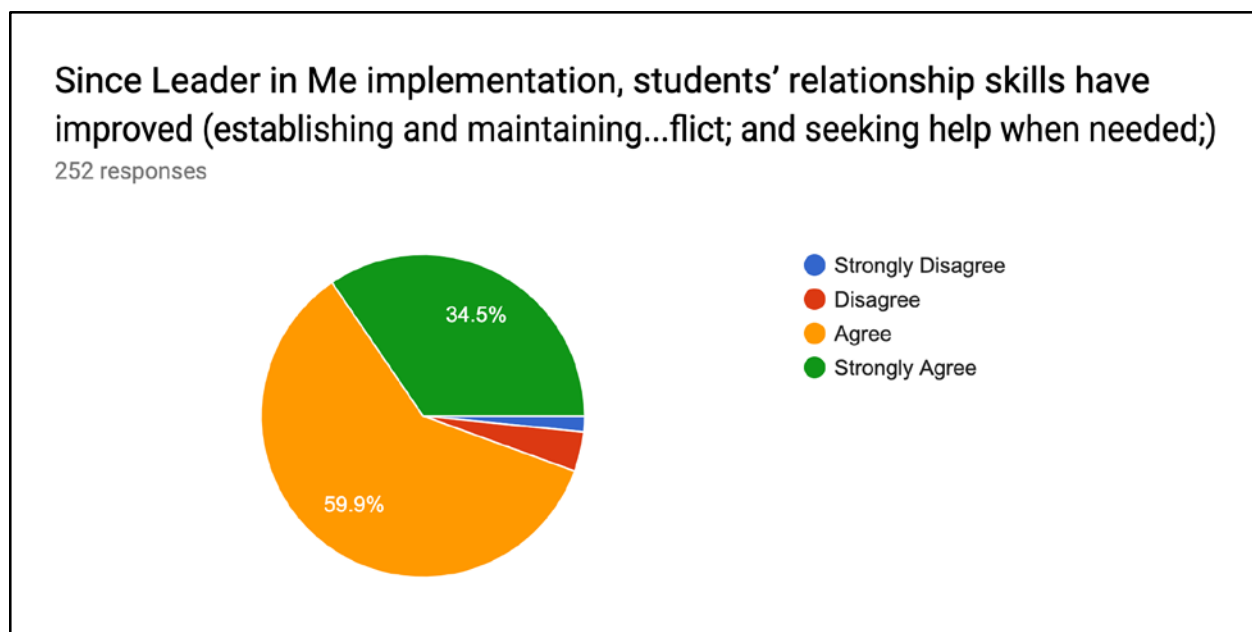


Figure 4B. Improved relationship skills.

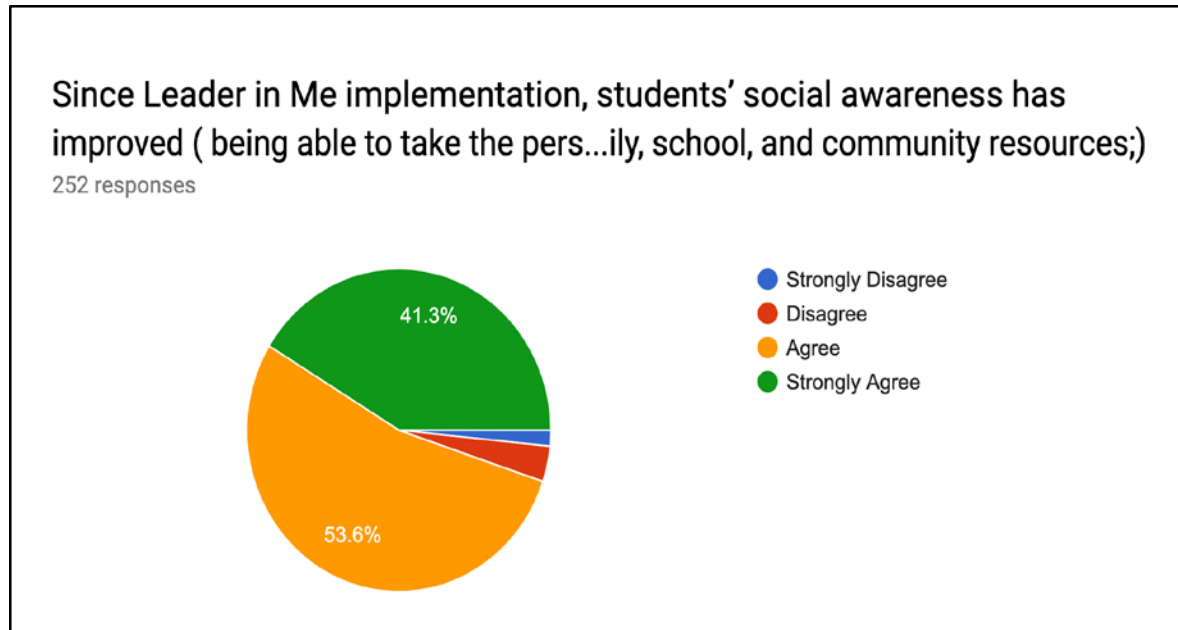


Figure 4C. Improved social awareness.

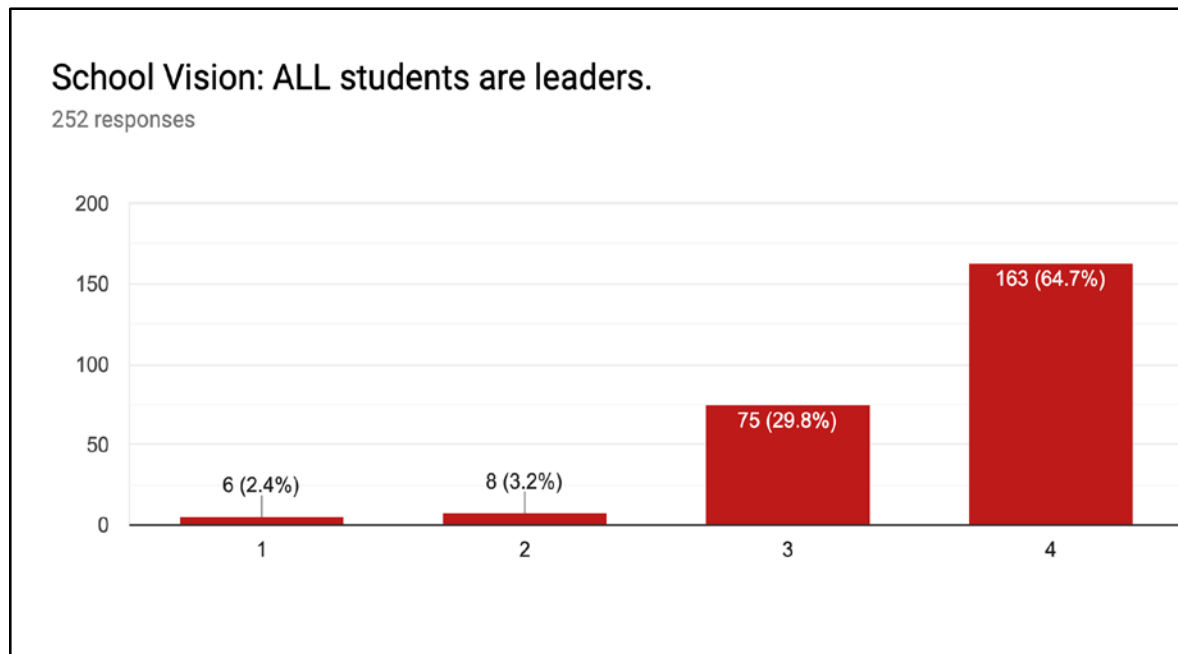


Figure 4D. Importance of school vision on school improvement

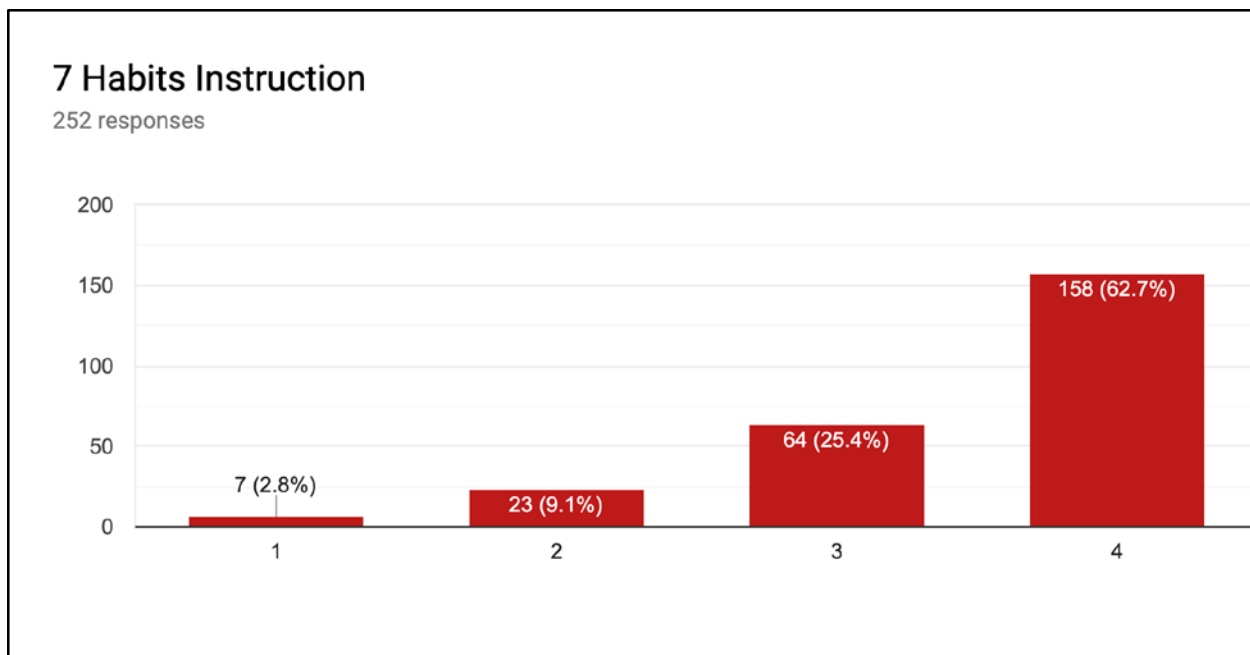


Figure 4E. Importance of seven habits instruction.

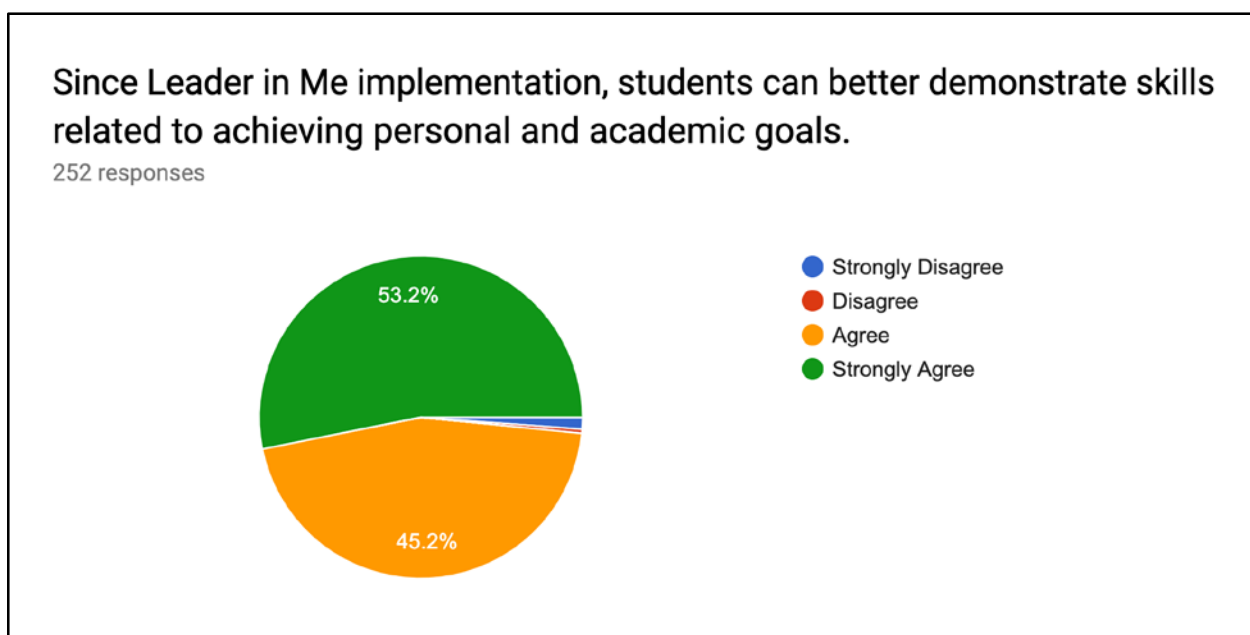


Figure 4F. Improved skills for achieving personal and academic goals.

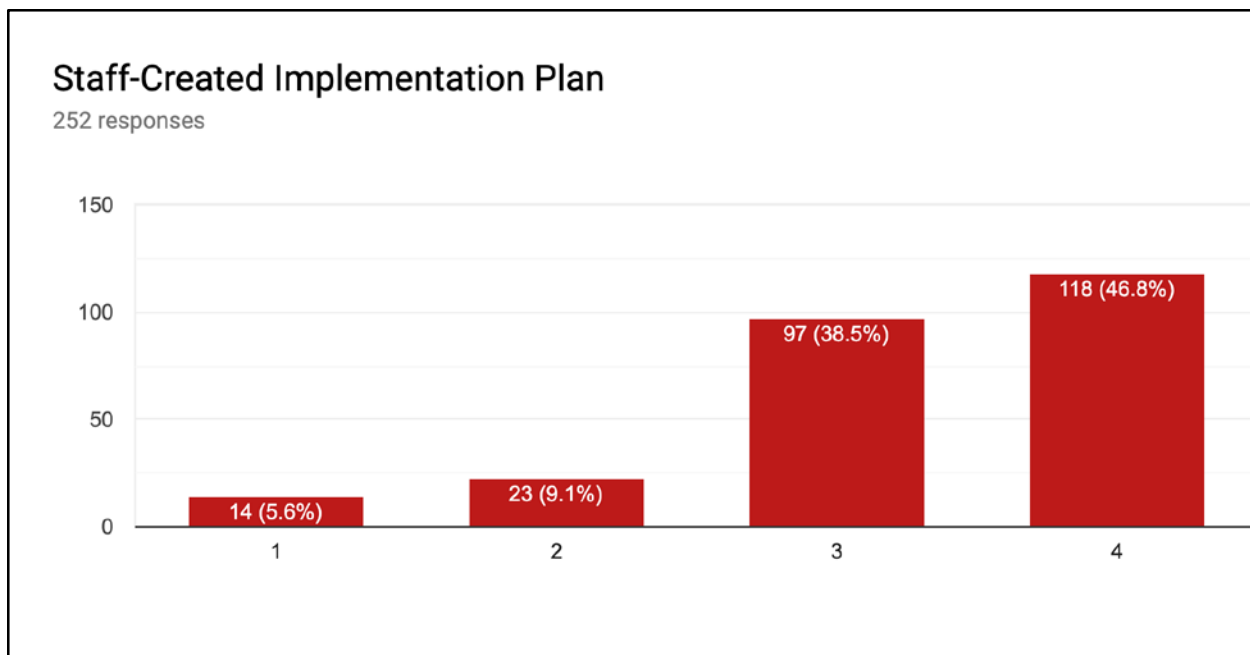


Figure 4G. Importance of staff-created implementation plan.

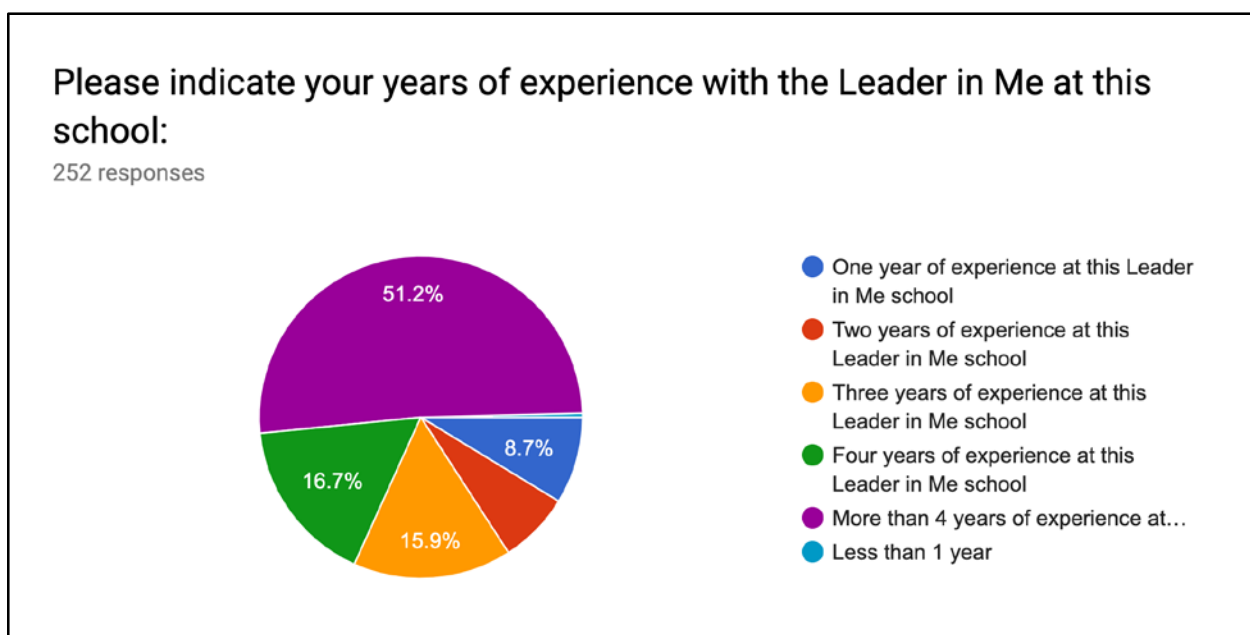


Figure 4H. Years of Experience with Leader in Me.

Appendix D: Bridging Current to Future Competencies, Culture, Conditions, and Context

4 Cs	As-Is	Strategies	To Be
Competencies	<p>Staff has varying levels of SEL strategies and best practices</p> <p>Approximately 40 % of staff understands the importance of student relationships</p>	<p>Collaborative teams will develop and share effective strategies for explicit SEL instruction.</p> <p>Data about the importance of student relationships will be shared, and ways to build and maintain trusting student relationships will be modeled.</p>	<p>The staff has a voluminous repertoire of SEL strategies</p> <p>All staff can identify multiple avenues to build relationships with students</p>
Culture	<p>The district does not currently value SEL instruction</p> <p>Lack of collective responsibility is evidenced</p> <p>Lack of self-confidence in the behavioral management of high needs students</p>	<p>A comprehensive district vision creation and articulation process will be performed</p> <p>Systems for staff to take responsibility for the academic and SEL success of students will be developed.</p> <p>The use of instructional coaching and round table collaboration meetings focused on difficult behaviors will be employed.</p>	<p>The district priority for SEL is confirmed by the clarity embedded in the mission statement</p> <p>All staff draw from and share with one another a wide range of ways to take collective responsibility with students.</p> <p>Staff proactively and independently take action to improve student behavior</p>
Conditions	<p>No Districtwide SEL curriculum is adopted</p> <p>No consistent measures of SEL competencies</p>	<p>A district-level SEL Steering Committee will be formed and charged with the task of researching and adopting a</p>	<p>Daily, weekly, and monthly times for district- aligned SEL instruction is identified and honored</p>

		<p>comprehensive SEL skills scope and sequence for grades K-5.</p> <p>Common Assessments aligned to the SEL standards will be created by districtwide grade-level teams.</p>	<p>SEL standards are assessed consistently across grade levels with common collaboratively created assessments</p>
Context	<p>Discipline referrals have remained relatively constant over 3 years without improvement</p> <p>Staff members feel ill-equipped to increase the inclusion of high need behavior students in regular ed. Settings</p>	<p>Students and staff will be engaged in the individual and grade-level goal-setting process to reduce the number of office referrals</p> <p>Inclusive Classroom training will be given that include site visits to highly regarded inclusive classrooms both in and out of the district.</p>	<p>Behavioral data shows a dramatically positive trend concerning a decrease in discipline referrals.</p> <p>100% of students are effectively included in the classroom in meaningful and beneficial ways</p>

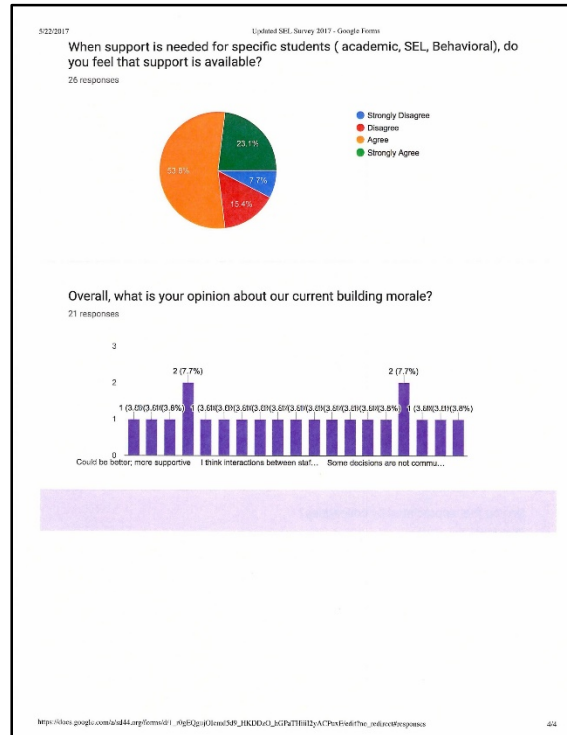
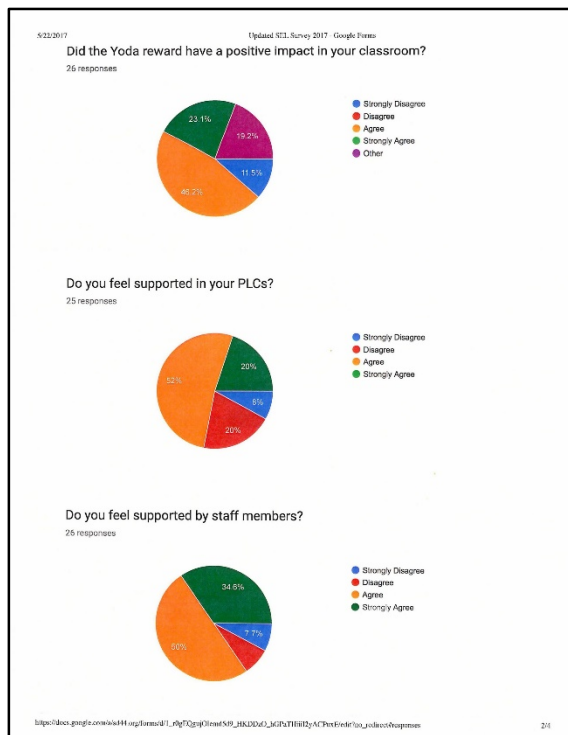
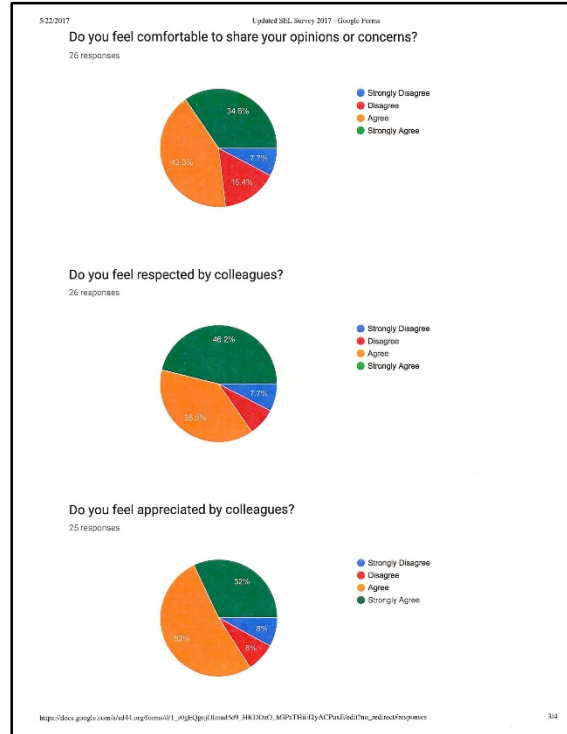
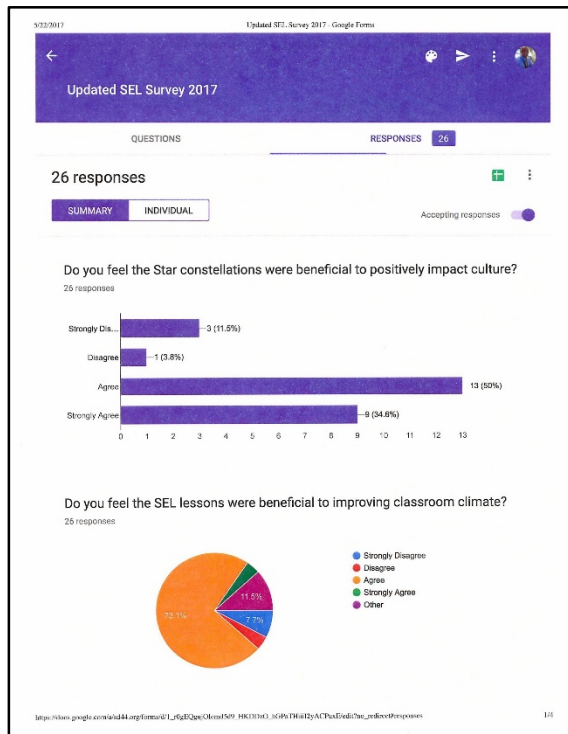
Appendix E: Strategies and Actions

4 Cs	Strategies	Actions
C O M P E T E N T C I E S	Collaborative teams will develop and share effective strategies for explicit SEL instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly grade-level PLC meetings agendas will include SEL lessons and strategy sharing. Grade-level spotlight sessions and gallery walks will be scheduled during monthly PD sessions. A shared online folder will be created to house documents and resources related to SEL practices. Expectations will set about the contributions and use of shared folder
	Data about the importance of student relationships will be shared, and ways to build and maintain trusting student relationships will be modeled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research findings about the positive impact of trusting student relationships will be presented to all district staff members A list of 10 examples of relationship-building activities will be presented along with video modeling to all district employees. A timeline will be included to indicate the expected engagement with each activity.
C U L T U R E	A comprehensive district vision creation and articulation process will be performed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Superintendent along with district administrators will hold student, staff, and community forums to elicit common themes and goals for the district A district-level strategic planning process will be outlined
	Systems for staff to take responsibility for the academic and SEL success of students will be developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A schoolwide mentoring program will be implemented, identifying an additional trusted adult in the building. Each grade level will identify ways to work smarter and share students across classroom walls
	The use of instructional coaching and round table collaboration meetings focused on difficult behaviors will be employed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Districtwide interventionists will meet monthly to reflect and collaborate on difficult behaviors that occurred in their respective buildings. An anonymous “I need help with...” forum

		<p>will be created to allow staff members to voice difficulties they need assistance with.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development will be provided based on specific situational needs that are identified
C O O N D I T I O N S	A district-level SEL Steering Committee will be formed and charged with the task of researching and adopting a comprehensive SEL skills scope and sequence for grades K-5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special service teams and general education teachers from each building will be invited to serve on a district-level SEL Steering Committee. A timeline for research, piloting, and eventual Board Of Education adoption will be collaboratively created. District Administrators will schedule representatives from top-rated SEL curriculum writers to present their resources.
	Common Assessments aligned to the SEL standards will be created by districtwide grade-level teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each district grade-level team will collaborate and identify common trimester assessments aligned to the BOE adopted SEL curriculum. Time will be secured on district institute days for this purpose to ensure consistency and buy-in.
C C O N T E X T	Students and staff will be engaged in the individual and grade-level goal-setting process to reduce the number of office referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-level and grade-level discipline referral data will be prepared and presented by building principals. Grade-level teams will be asked to develop discipline-related SMART goals specific to the needs of the students they serve. Templates for individual student goal setting on behavior will be developed and shared with grade-level staff.
	Inclusive Classroom training will be given that include site visits to highly regarded inclusive classrooms both in and out of the district.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District-level administrators will research area district practices related to including all students in the regular education environment. Principals will identify leaders in their respective buildings who have successfully managed difficult behaviors in the regular education environment. A timeline for professional development will be created that presents and models the

		strategies and practices that have been effective.
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Appendix F: Staff SEL Survey 2017



Overall, what is your opinion about our current building morale?

Could be better; more supportive

Some decisions are not communicated effectively which leads to confusion and guessing. Not togetherness.

I think overall, building morale is good, at times the staff is a little disjointed from one another, but I think that more people feel connected to each other than not.

This year seemed to be stressful for many, I think "district morale" affected building morale.
positive

The WHS morale is very positive.

I feel morale is positive and uplifting. WHS is a unique place. We are there for each other, even at the toughest times. We approach our job in a positive way, which can't be said of all buildings in the district.

I think interactions between staff members is positive and students feed off of that. Overall, students seem happy to be here and enjoy their time at WHS.

I think a lot of positive things went on this year that were fun and interesting. Teachers were in a tough spot due to the administration problems. Hopefully the change for next year will be positive. It is also helpful when the principal is approachable. When he/she is happy and positive it greatly affects the building morale.

It has increased this year.

I think that our current building morale is great!

I think that there have been quite a few major curriculum changes that have come about and teachers are feeling more overwhelmed than usual. However we do support one another and help each other get through it as best as we can..

I believe our morale is in a good place. Overall, I think people are happy coming to WHS! We have so many wonderful people that are always willing to lend a hand and get involved!!

good

The WHS morale is very positive.

I feel it is great. Everyone is working well together. The kids love it and I feel it is good to get to know other students you may not get a chance to know.

I feel it is great. Everyone is working well together. The kids love it and I feel it is good to get to know other students you may not get a chance to know.

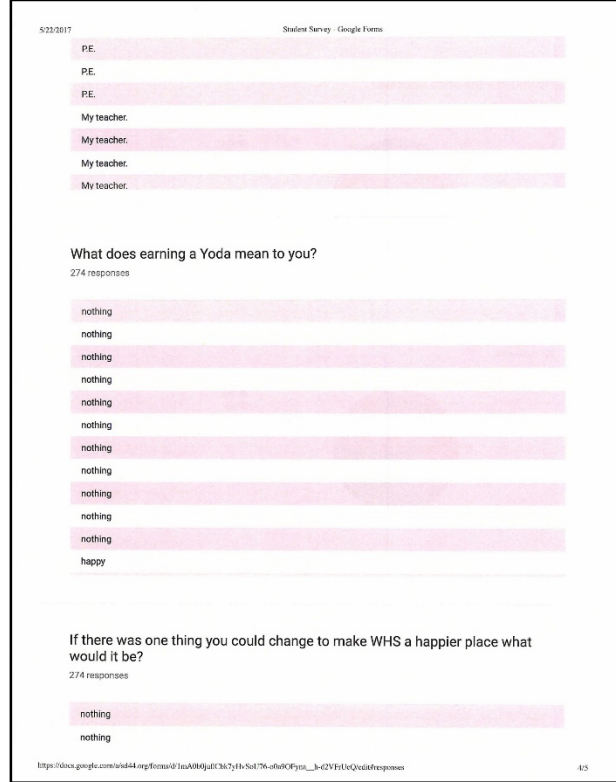
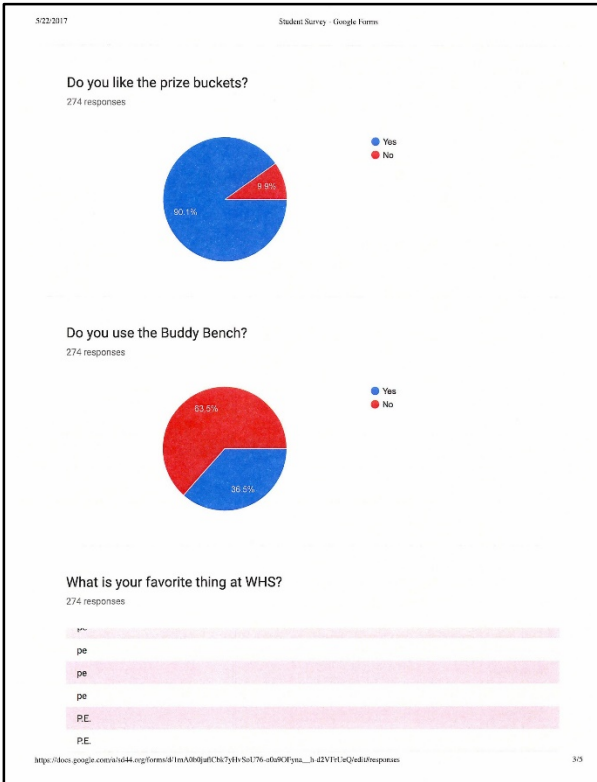
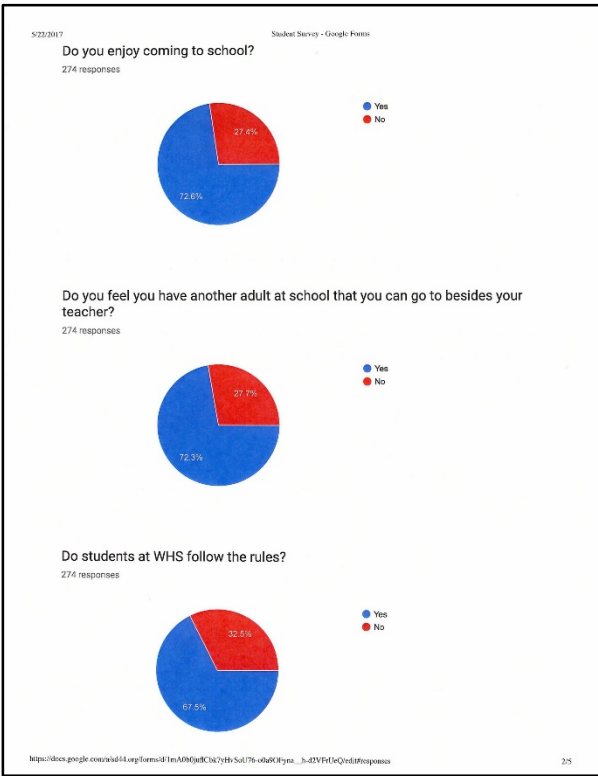
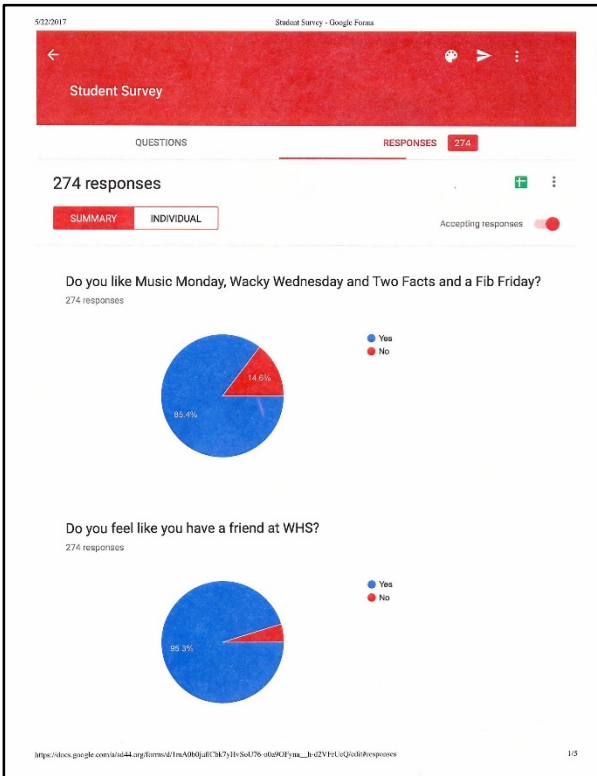
I think WHS has a strong building morale

I am hopeful with the changes in the admin office that there will be a an improvement in morale in our building.

It is pretty strong. Better than the end of last year.

I think morale is better in comparison to last year. I feel our early release days were beneficial, and provided us with good information. I feel they were sometimes rushed.

Appendix G: Student SEL Survey 2017



5/22/2017

Student Survey - Google Forms

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

nothing

lockers

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1w506jgH13475toSd77s-dARU3m_A_42V1tLQz0t8kqpmw

35

Appendix H: Survey and Interview Questions

Leader in Me Survey Questions:

School Name: _____

1. Please select your primary role at your school from the list below.

_____ Administrator _____ Certified Staff _____ Noncertified Staff

2. Please indicate your years of experience with The Leader in Me at this school:

_____ during or before summer 2013-present _____ Jan 2014-present

_____ summer 2014-present _____ Jan 2015 or after-present _____ summer 2015- present _____ Jan

2016- present, _____ summer 2016- present, _____ Jan 2017- present, _____ summer 2017 - present

3. Please rank the following four LIM process components in order of their relative impact on school improvement (1 being the MOST impactful, 4 being the LEAST):

_____ School Vision: ALL students are leaders.

_____ Staff-Created Implementation Plan

_____ 7 Habits Instruction

_____ Student Demonstration of Leadership (Leadership Notebooks, Goal Setting, Student-Led Conferences)

4. Please rate the degree to which you agree with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Leader in Me process positively impacts, social-emotional learning at this school	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students' self-awareness has improved (accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students' self-management has improved. (regulating one's emotions to handle stress, controlling impulses, and persevering in addressing challenges; expressing emotions appropriately; and setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students' social awareness has improved (being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; and recognizing and making best use of family, school, and community resources)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students' relationship skills have improved (establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; and seeking help when needed)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students' responsible decision-making has improved (making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations, and contributing to the well-being of one's school and community.)				
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better identify and manage one's emotions and behavior	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better recognize personal qualities and external supports.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better recognize individual and group similarities and differences.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Since Leader in Me implementation, students can better contribute to the well-being of one's school and community.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Principal Interview Questions:

How long have you been a Leader in Me school principal?

How long have you been a Leader in Me lighthouse school principal?

How did you first become interested in The Leader in Me?

What were the main reasons that your school began The Leader in Me process?

What has been the most successful parts of Leader in Me process? Why?

What has been the least successful parts of The Leader in Me process? Why?

How has The Leader in Me process impacted social-emotional learning at your school?

Were there any unexpected results that you identified after implementation of the Leader in Me process?